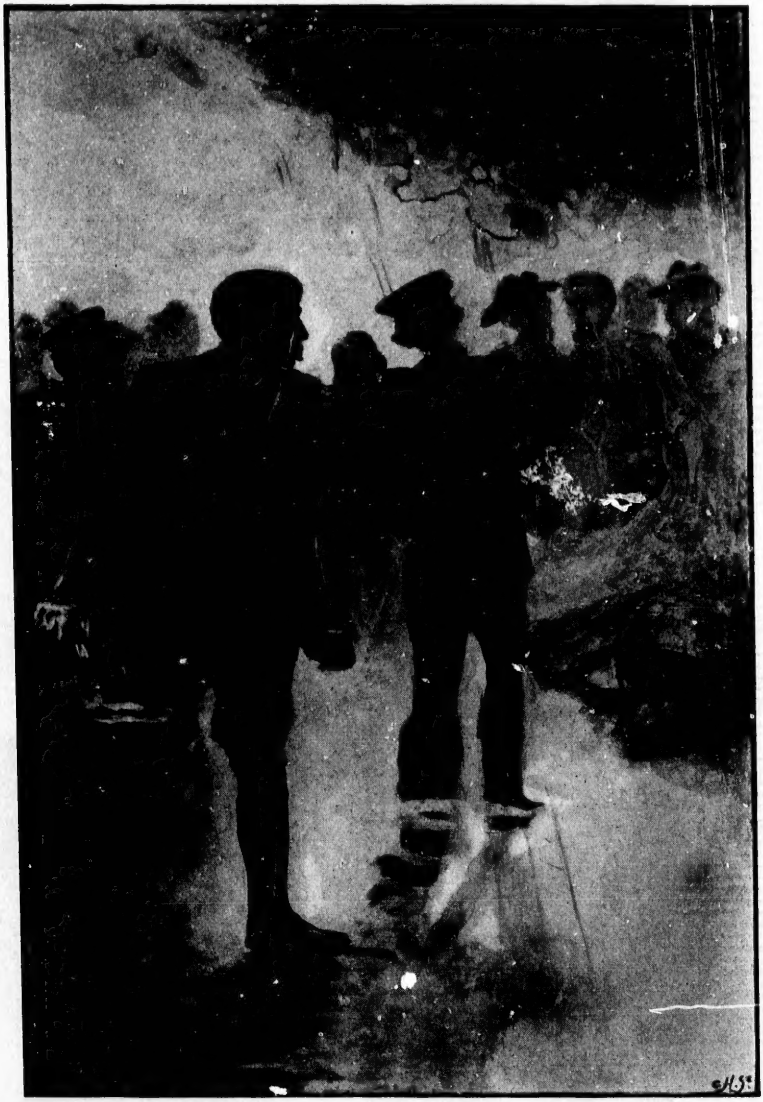
THE REVENGE OF VALERIE.



"AND A STRUGGLE BEGAN . . . ."

"The Revenge of Valerie."
(*Frontispiece.*)

THE REVENGE OF VALERIE:

A ROMANCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

BY

HUME NISBET,

AUTHOR OF

"A SWEET SINNER," "BAIL UP," "THE REBEL CHIEF,"
"KINGS OF THE SEA," "HUNTING FOR GOLD,"
"THE SWAMPERS," ETC.

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY M. NISBET.

(Dramatic Rights Reservea.)

LONDON:
F. V. WHITE & CO.,
14, BEDFORD STREET, STRAND, W.C.
1900.

NW
823
N723

B AMTMANN
#10.00
JUL 5 '62

PRINTED BY
KELLY'S DIRECTORIES LIMITED, 182, 183 AND 184, HIGH HOLBORN, W.C.
CITY DEPOT, 50, LEADENHALL STREET, E.C.,
AND KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.

mTmann
10.00
UL 5 '62

DEDICATION.

TO

ALEXANDER KIRK MACKIE, Esq., S.S.C.,

OF EDINBURGH.

WITH MANY TENDER

MEMORIES FROM THE

AUTHOR.

234955

PREFACE.

DEAR READERS,

In the following romance, I have endeavoured to show how Jealousy—the twin sister of Love—may transform a generous nature into that of a ruthless devil. I have also attempted to show how a mother may sacrifice for her child what she could not for her husband. Love is a mighty factor for good and evil, but the nearest approach to that Divine love which was exhibited on the Cross is the love of a true mother for her child.

I have in the chapters which succeed this preface related a tragedy founded on facts. The tragedy is much more commonplace than many of my unsophisticated readers may be able to realize

—I trust none of them may ever have the misery to prove its truth by experience.

There is one moral only in it, which is, that wealth and rank do not always bring happiness to humanity. Throughout these pages run the finding and the gathering of much gold, in the wilds of the Yukon district, and in the city of London.

How much all this fuss and exertion are worth I leave my readers to discover for themselves. I leave them also to choose the better part in this search after felicity.

To possess money is a laudable and a universal desire. But the passion to acquire riches may be carried too far.

Happiness, like heaven, appears different to different minds. To some a crown, or at least a coronet, seems a coveted object of ambition. To others, the exhaustless funds of a Monte Christo open up vistas of joy which intoxicate them.

Not being of an ambitious nature and greatly

averse to the doubtful seductions of society, I hold my own ideas regarding true happiness. To win a title does not seem to me worth the exertions required. To become a millionaire appears to hang a millstone round one's neck. Both aims are only added anxieties to a life already extremely tried.

But to possess health, reasoning faculties and toleration seem the highest possible boons which man can wish; add to these great gifts, the sufficiency to provide for the necessities of life, with enough over to aid others, and give a start in life to those hostages of Fortune which we must leave, and we come nearer perfect happiness than we have any right to expect. If, besides all these mercies, we can also claim a little sincere love and friendship, then we can ask no more from Heaven, for our cups are filled. Blest with these we may pass through life easy; satisfied that we are loved for our own qualities, and not courted for our condition or influence. We raise no envy nor

covetousness, and, when our turn comes, there is not too much to regret leaving behind. This to me seems to be the acme of human desires. We take our place on the ferry boat of Charon, to go to those who have gone before us, and *there* wait for those who must come after.

With these words, and the hope that my story may induce those who are at present thirsty to win what must be left, to pause and consider the true value of things mundane, I make my bow and once again retire to my work-shop.

THE AUTHOR.

CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	The Duel	1
II.	Valerie Waits	9
III.	A Disappointment for Valerie	18
IV.	Valerie gets a Surprise	29
V.	In the Gloaming	38
VI.	Despair	47
VII.	In Dawson City	57
VIII.	Bill Sykes Goes on the Trail	66
IX.	Hope Eastlake Begins Her Troubles	75
X.	Hope Eastlake at Brixton	83
XI.	Hope Leaves the House of Mrs. Solomon Davis	92
XII.	Bill Sykes Brings Bad News	101
XIII.	Stephen Belwood Receives the Duchess Valerie at His City Office	111
XIV.	A Diabolical Plot	120
XV.	The Mouse Trap	129
XVI.	A Rude Awakening	138
XVII.	The Entrapment of Hope	147
XVIII.	The Sacrifice	156

CHAP. PAGE

XIX.—Lewis John is Provided For . . 165

XX.—The "Gadfly" 173

XXI.—Victim of Fashion 182

XXII.—The Cyclone 191

XXIII.—Gold Dust and Nuggets . . 200

XXIV.—No. B. 45 208

XXV.—Good-Bye, Baby 222

XXVI.—Noblesse Oblige 227

XXVII.—Sir Lewis Eastlake Joins the Duchess Valerie 243

XXVIII.—The Riot—and Afterwards . 252

XXIX.—After Mars, Venus 265

XXX.—The Attack of the Yukon Pirates 271

XXXI.—The Spectre with the Scythe . 278

XXXII.—Stephen Belwood at Home . . 287

XXXIII.—Farewell to Valerie 294

XXXIV.—The End.—Relighted Fires . . 303

PAGE
165
173
182
191
200
208
222
227
243
252
265
271
278
287
294
303

THE REVENGE OF VALERIE.

CHAPTER I.

THE DUEL.

"CHEAT! Sharper!"

"Liar!"

The first two words were uttered in low, but fiercely sibilant accents; the single retort pealed loudly through the card-room, and startled everyone present.

It was bad form to speak above a whisper in this portion of the Calydon Club. Members won or lost without a murmur. Domestics moved about noiselessly, receiving the softly-breathed orders with a mute inclination of the head. A Sabbath-like stillness generally pervaded here, which had seldom, if ever, been profaned by such barbarous exclamations.

But if the words were startling, the action that followed almost while the retort was still ringing in their ears, was scandalous in the extreme.

Three of the members were seen to leap suddenly from their chairs; one to close his fist and strike another full in the face, knocking him backwards; while the third gripped hold of the assailant and held him from repeating the unpardonable offence.

Confusion reigned for the next few moments in this refined and well-ordered club-room. All the members present closed round the scene, some raising the prostrate man, and others helping to force from the room the flushed and excited assailant.

"Good Heavens! Eastlake, how could you be such an ass as to strike a fellow here? You'll have to resign, you know."

"I know, Eric, it was foolish, but I could not sit quietly and hear a bounder like that call you such names."

"You might, however, have let me manage that part of the business for myself, you know, old fellow."

"Save your reproaches, Eric, and have a brandy-and-soda. I am past sermons, and what is done is done."

The waiter who brought the refreshment looked very grave as he placed it before the two young men. He knew that he was serving one at least with his last drink in that sedate West End establishment. He, the waiter, had reasons to look grave and sorrowful, for the offender, Sir Lewis Eastlake, had been a patron who generally placed gold on his tray, when ordering a drink, and did not lift the silver that was brought back.

After a few moments, the two friends were left severely alone by their fellow clubmen, who flocked back to the card-room to see the other man and hear his story.

"Deuced pity it wasn't St. Arnoul," said both members and waiters as they discussed the matter in their different departments. "We could have spared Eric St. Arnoul, but reckless, handsome Lewis Eastlake will be a decided loss to the club."

Captain Eric St. Arnoul was not nearly such a favourite in the Calydon as was his bosom friend Sir Lewis Eastlake. In the first place, his circumstances were too similar to those of the majority of the Calydons—*i.e.*, much more frequently on the I O U than the ready-money system. In the second place, he was much too good a card player for any except young callow members to challenge to a game. In the third place, he was excessively particular about his change when the stewards and waiters brought it to him. Therefore, he was neither generally respected nor greatly trusted by those who knew him for any length of time.

Sir Lewis Eastlake, however, was the one friend who believed in him and trusted him utterly. Mutual acquaintances—for this is about the warmest term we can use to denote the "dear boy" intimacy of town and club friends—said with a suggestive and careless shrug, that Captain Eric was the evil genius of gay and careless Sir Lewis. Perhaps he was; evil geniuses and their victims usually cling more closely to each other than disinterested and mentor-like friends. The evil genius does not sermonise too much; neither is he over-sensitive to take offence. He likewise has the art of making himself necessary and agreeable to his "companions." That is why the victim is so apt to go the way his evil genius suggests rather than listen to the warning voice of wisdom.

Sir Lewis Eastlake had been the fag at college of Eric St. Arnoul, therefore he had begun his young life by admiring, lending to, and believing in his impecunious chief. Later on, when they met together again after the professional career in India of Captain St.

Arnoul, the wealthy and reckless baronet was as ready to play the *rôle* of banker, bosom friend and trusting admirer as before. There is a link which binds the dog, cat and parasite to their protectors that is sometimes stronger than kinship. Sir Lewis admired Captain Eric, and Captain Eric exploited and advised Sir Lewis.

Perchance he loved his trusting friend also ; of late it had been observed that he did his utmost to keep the baronet from female entanglements. Captain Eric did not mind his friend plunging on the racecourse or at the cards, but he certainly protected him as far as he could from the sirens who haunt the career of the plunger.

Sir Lewis Eastlake was a plunger of the most pronounced type. Twenty-four years of age, well born, and up to this night fairly well bred. Grey eyed, classically handsome, and robust in health ; in the three years since his majority he had managed to mortgage, up to the hilt, a handsome estate, which had brought to his father five thousand per year.

On this night he had entered his club with fifty and some odd pounds in his pocket-book, and debts of honour for two thousand eight hundred to meet within the next seven days.

He had interviewed his money-lender, Mr. Stephen Belwood, on that afternoon, with but indifferent success. By a supreme sacrifice—the yielding to become a director on one of Mr. Stephen Belwood's company boards—he had managed to get that fifty pounds as advance of his salary. He also had a vague half-promise that his present turf debts would be met also, for the use of his time-honoured name, and—the

abandonment of his future prospects. In fact, the reckless and luckless baronet was in a very bad hole when he entered his club that night.

To make matters worse, he had dined not wisely, but too well, and the wine, although possibly good and ancient, had not made him happy.

Therefore when he dropped upon his bosom friend and Charles Bingham, the young bounder, playing cards, he was not entirely in possession of his reasoning faculties. It appeared a fair game to his blinking eyes, and when the bounder flung down his cards and said "Cheat! Sharper!" to the man he called friend, both his tongue and his sledge-hammer fist leapt out with the impetuosity of the falchion of the knights of old who had made his name historical.

It was foolish, desperately indiscreet, and exceeding bad form, according to all social etiquette, but it was done, and he now sat moodily sipping his brandy-and-soda, and waiting on the result of that rash blow.

Anyone looking at the two young gentlemen, sitting in the smoke-room—and waiting on the termination of that fracas, could not have accused Captain Eric St. Arnoul of lack of emotion. He was decidedly the most nervous and concerned of the pair. His face was ghastly. His lips grinned with emotion, and altogether he appeared as if he loved his friend.

As for Sir Lewis, he was a trifle gloomy, but he was not much put out.

"I expect the bounder will want to cross the Channel," observed Sir Lewis, lighting a fresh cigarette.

"I expect so; but really, you know, Lewis, I am the one he ought to challenge."

"Never mind that; I'll meet him."

"Don't you think it would be best to offer an apology? You see, you really are in the wrong this time," observed the Captain.

"No," said Sir Lewis decidedly. "I've got to the end of my tether, and the sooner I'm wiped out the better. You will be my second. Propose Cherbourg; I've a fancy for Cherbourg, as you know my old friend Dr. Waldred is located there; besides, it's so far on the way to the Villa Idumea if things go right. You manage that for me, dear boy; only—no apology."

At this moment a deputation from the insulted member came into the smoke-room. The original cause of the quarrel was evidently forgotten; the blow given by Sir Lewis was the *casus belli* now.

In a few moments the matter was settled. Cherbourg was decided upon, and Doctor John Waldred, as a member of the club, fixed on to act for both parties. To-morrow they would travel separately and meet on the day after at the place appointed by the seconds.

That night Captain Eric St. Arnoul accompanied his ruined friend home to his chambers, and as they had to start on the following morning, they each sought their bedrooms early.

Captain St. Arnoul paced backwards and forwards for a good half hour, with a face of the most unutterable anguish.

"Curse my luck, to bring this on Lewis," he muttered, as he strode about gnashing his teeth. "If he falls, I'm finished. Valerie will never forgive me; I might as well take the bullet myself."

He poured out a stiff tumblerful of brandy and water, and, drinking it off, flung himself on his couch

as miserable a man of the world as anyone could possibly imagine.

Sir Lewis did not feel half so deeply over this affair as did his friend and evil genius. He took only his customary nightcap, and smoked his usual fancy meerschaum in order to colour it properly. As he sat smoking, he thought:

"I suppose the bounder will try to pot me. Well, I have no ill-will to him, so I'll aim wide. I'm not a good shot, but if I aim wide enough I'm sure to miss him. I never was much good at pistol practice.

"Suppose I am potted. Well, that will end all my troubles, and so farewell to dear Hope. What a fool I've been these two years past. If I had only halted sooner! I wonder if she could have stopped me! She is a sweet girl. So is the Duchess Valerie, but then the Duchess is an experienced woman of the world who likes to amuse herself, and Hope is a girl whom only a good man ought to approach. I have no chance with the Duchess, and I have hardly any right to think of Hope Waldred.

"Well, I hope the bounder may pot me to-morrow; if not, I guess I'll have to think of emigrating either to West Australia, South Africa, or British Columbia, since I have finished my career in England."

He looked at his meerschaum tenderly, there was carved upon it a fox bringing a wild duck home to its three little cubs. One side he had already coloured fairly well, where one cub was crawling over the back of its parent, but the side where the two little cubs were disputing for the duck was still sickly looking.

"I wonder who will tint my meerschaum properly," he murmured, as he placed it carefully in its case and

prepared for bed. "I can't take it to the goldfields even if I escape the bullet of the bounder."

* * * * * *

Champagne and brandy are not good training drinks for duellists. The bounder's seconds instructed him wisely, and he followed their instructions faithfully, abjured all things likely to make his hand shake, and aimed low.

The bounder was in luck in the toss up for places. He got his back to the rising sun, while Sir Lewis had the sunbeams almost in his eyes.

"One, two, three—fire!"

They both fired simultaneously. The bounder aimed at Sir Lewis's lowest vest button, and hit him in the collarbone. Sir Lewis aimed at a tree ten yards wide, and hit the poor bounder in the left lung. That's the worst of duellists who have not practised with the pistol. They hit what they mean to miss, and miss what they mean to hit.

Dr. John Waldred was all over the field. His friend, Sir Lewis Eastlake, had merely received a broken collar-bone, but the poor young member, Charles Bingham, had finished his career. The two were borne off the field insensible. So ended the famous Calydon Club duel, of which more anon.

CHAPTER II.

VALERIE WAITS.

THE Duchess Valerie reclined in the easiest of chairs on the balcony of her Genoa Palace, the Villa Idumea.

The Palace stood on one of the high terraces, and overlooked the radiant azure harbour and gulf, so that from this back balcony the spectator could look down upon the gardens and roofs of many other palaces, and over these again to the shipping that lay in the harbour of this picturesque and busy *La Superba.*

It is a lovely panorama at any season of the year, but on this balmy September evening it appeared at its best.

Soft airs wafted from the deep blue gulf through the fig and orange trees, laden with ripe fruit. On the garden walls clustered the purple grapes and vine tendrils, that spread out from innumerable and massive stems. In the garden, with its terraces, marble steps, and spouting fountains, glowed perfume-exhaling flowers, all adding to the enchanting picture.

There was nothing gimcrack or modern about the Villa Idumea except, perhaps, the furnishing of the drawing-room, outside the window of which reclined the Duchess and her huge dog Paris. The walls, floors, ceiling, and stairways were of the ancient marbles of Italy, mellowed and stained by age. Lofty, spacious apartments, like galleries in their extent;

wide and long lobbies and staircases so great that they dwarfed the people who used them.

The Duchess Valerie had everything which mortal can dream and wish for in the search after earthly happiness. She was fabulously rich, and the possessor of many mansions, fertile acres, quarries, and money-producing mines. She was young, not yet twenty-two, and ravishingly beautiful; also, what she valued most of all, she was a widow, and at liberty to give her hand to the man she loved.

Six months ago her husband, the amiable but aged Duc Idumea, had bestowed upon her this last of many treasures, her freedom, by dying just at the time a sensible old man with a young spouse ought to die.

For five years she had acted the part of duchess with exemplary discretion; having many admirers and friends, but none whom scandal could tack on to her name as a lover.

This was before she met Sir Lewis Eastlake, but since that fatal day, a twelvemonth previously, every hour had been a battle between discretion and overmastering desire. The desire to cast everything aside for the sake of love, and the discretion that bade her tutor and curb her unruly heart for the sake of her splendid position and vast income.

It was just when the struggle was becoming almost unbearable that her obliging husband died, leaving her his sole heiress, and her heart at liberty to indulge legitimately in the sweet delicious infatuation which possessed her soul and body.

She had been a week and a half at Genoa waiting for the man she adored to come to her. It was six months since they had parted, and since then she had

been living in the closest seclusion. By the world she was supposed to be mourning the loss of that grand old descendant of the Doges. Society and the Church extolled her for her rigid decorum. At last she could indulge in the luxury of a visitor without raising gossip, and so she had invited her former friend to come and enliven her loneliness.

Two letters had come by that morning's post which equally interested her. Now, as she reclined on the cushioned chair, clad in that clinging black, and most becoming widow's robe, reading them over for the fourth or fifth time, let us also read them, whilst she is selecting a fresh cigarette and lighting it. They are both lying on her knee open. One she has kissed, before and after she read it each time. The other she had read, without kissing, yet with pleasure. The oft-kissed epistle is short, and is worded by a person who is evidently more used to writing telegrams and post-cards than letters ; this is like a telegram in its brevity and terseness.

"My Dear Valerie,—Deuced badly hit last week, and dropped a pot. If I can manage to raise the wind I'll be with you on Wednesday. Thanks awfully for your nice letter.

"Ever yours sincerely,

"Lewis Eastlake."

It wasn't a very lover-like letter ; but women who are in love are apt to read a world of meaning between the lines. The young Duchess Valerie evidently did this, for she looked upon it with starry eyes and a tender smile of contentment which made her beauty

tenfold transcendent and adorable, as she took it up again, kissed it fervently and re-read it.

"Dear, dear Lewis!" she murmured fondly; "my hero, my Paladin. You do not excel as a letter-writer but, all the same, I think what you wanted to say, and that is enough."

The other letter was of a different character. It was also terse, but it was eminently business-like and respectful. It, like the other, was post-marked from London, and read as follows:

"YOUR GRACE,—Sir Lewis Eastlak-, a week ago, borrowed another £10,000, and renewed his former bills. Acting under your instructions, I have advanced him this sum, and renewed these bills without demur. It is my duty, however, to inform your Grace that already Sir Lewis has borrowed more from you, under my name, than his estates can possibly realise if foreclosed. He has been plunging heavily lately, and this present advance does not cover his turf losses. Shall I foreclose, or do you depute me to give him any further advances? Kindly wire at once, for I expect him back again in a few days.

"Your respectful servant,

"STEPHEN BELWOOD."

"The reckless fellow!" murmured the youthful duchess, indulgently. "Of course he'll want money to come and see me, and I can easily indulge in this little extravagance. Ah, my love! what is money between us, if you but love me, as I feel you must do?"

She sent out a thin, spiral wreath of smoke from her rosebud lips, and looked dreamily over the dark-

ening sky and sea. A divine contentment glowed upon her dark face, and made her rich brown eyes like deep pools. So a radiant Oriental might have appeared when she had drawn a dainty fish from the stream.

"Ah, my darling! I think you must be mine now, even although you never know who has been your creditor for the past six months. Come and take all that is mine so that you take me."

The duchess was a woman sorely smitten by the god Cupid, and, as we all are when wounded, she was modest about her own charms, and had angled craftily for the man she was after.

Sir Lewis Eastlake, the prodigal heir of many prodigal ancestors, had met the Duchess Valerie on one of his sojourns abroad. There was nothing wrong in their friendship, for if he was a reckless gambler, he had at least the chivalry of his race towards women, and would have loathed himself had he harboured a single thought of dishonour towards his noble and aged host.

But he had an insinuating and gallant manner towards ladies. He was also in the first flush of manhood and superbly handsome. Then, perhaps, while he only behaved as a hundred of his sex would towards a young, beautiful and gracious hostess who was removed from him by wedlock, it did not seem to her the same.

He was by nature cool, composed, and gentlemanly. She, fervid and imaginative. Every woman knows her points to a nicety. The sex may like flattery, but they are not blinded although they acquiesce. Their mirror is their mentor and critic, and this

they study, as Telemachus never did his sage adviser.

The Duchess Valerie had faced her mentor, and been passed as competent. She was the most perfectly made and the loveliest woman in Italy; one, indeed, to fascinate Jove or Julius Cæsar. Her blue-black tresses reached to her ankles. Her young figure might have made Queen Cleopatra poison her, at the time of her introduction to the Roman hero. She was beautiful in her matchless tawny beauty, and she was unmatched in her witchlike fascinations.

"He must love me," she had often murmured passionately, as she watched herself in the mirror, after her maid had left her for the night, while her aged husband was drinking his mulled Chianti in his library. "He must love me, for *I am beautiful.*" But when the aged Duke died, she had not felt so sure of this, as her hero had been so cool.

"Perhaps other women are as beautiful as I am. Perhaps my skin is too dark."

She had prayed to the Madonna to send her the man she adored, yet, as Cromwell told his Ironsides: "Pray to the Lord, but keep your powder dry."

The Duchess Valerie believed in her saints, but she had also the powder, and she meant to keep it dry.

Therefore, in case her hero might be tempted, she resolved, like a prudent descendant of the old Romans to environ him round with meshes, so that he must succumb. Thus she had laid her snares, and, as she thought, captured him in her net.

He was her captive. With a word through her agent, Stephen Belwood, she could involve him in unutterable ruin.

But she had no intention of putting on the screw unless—unless he kicked against the traces.

Her cousin, Eric St. Arnoul, was her slave, and Sir Lewis Eastlake his bosom friend. He would keep him free from intrigue, and urge him to her loving arms. Alas! for the woman who cannot depend on her own fascination, but must employ such outside help.

The young duchess was happy on this evening, and her retainers had basked under this favourable influence all through the day. Lewis Eastlake was coming that night. In another couple of hours he would be here, with her all alone. She had wired to her London agent to let him have what he required without questions. The dinner was ordered, and his rooms prepared. Now she waited on the man she loved so devotedly, so all-absorbedly.

The dog at her side waited also: a grim Russian wolfhound, with his vast bulk and square, sinister head. He crouched at the side of her chair and looked out at the landscape with a lurid eye, while she lolled back on her cushions and puffed cigarette after cigarette, for she was morbid, excitable and impatient.

"Shall I serve tea, your grace?" said the meek domestic, appearing through the door with a lamp.

"Yes. What time does the train come in from Paris?"

"It is due in half an hour, your grace."

"Let dinner be served forty minutes afterwards."

The orderly servant went out, and the Duchess sprang up from her chair and began pacing the balcony like a panther in its cage.

"Forty-five minutes more, and Lewis will be here,"

she gasped, as she paced swiftly from end to end of the balcony.

How exquisitely lovely she was, as she went backwards and forwards in her sable robes, with her flashing diamonds round her lovely neck that glowed swanlike from the black dress. It was the glide of a graceful beast of prey rather than a woman, a young animal full of life, strength and passion.

Backwards and forwards she swept in front of the shaded lamp, whilst the great hound followed her motions with its lurid glances, as it sat on its haunches by the empty chair. The hound sat like a sphinx with the lamplight streaming over it.

Outside daylight faded from the sky, and Genoa, with its crowded wharfs, became a maze of mystery, with yellow lights below and silver sparkling gems above.

The Duchess pulled out her tiny watch and looked at it. The hour was approaching, and even as she glanced at the time she heard the carriage drive out of the court below, and roll away towards the station.

He would be here presently, therefore she must see how she looked before he came. With a swift step she passed through the window and entered the lighted rooms, with a backward glance at the glowing stars.

Up to the mirror she glided, and there examined her reflection with rigid scrutiny and satisfaction.

"I am beautiful," she muttered, smiling tenderly at her own reflection. "Beautiful, thank God, since beauty is what men value, when wealth comes with it. He has looked on no more perfect woman since he left me I feel sure, and few so rich as I am. Yes, I ought to feel sure of Lewis with these united gifts."

At last there is the sound of the returning carriage, as it rolls from the crowded strada into the echoing courtyard of the palace, and stops at the front gate.

"He is here, my love, my life!" the enamoured woman cries, as she places her hand over her heart, to still its throbbing, and sinks into a chair.

Paris, the wolfhound, hears the sounds also, and enters the room with ears bristling.

After a pause—the pause of a man divesting himself of his overcoat, hat and gloves, and ascending the wide stairs decorously. Then with a gentle knock at the door, the major domo enters to announce the visitor.

The young duchess springs up with eager, glowing face, and shining eyes, just like any plebeian girl in love would do under the circumstances. Paris, the dog, rises also and shows his fangs, while he growls deeply.

CHAPTER III.

A DISAPPOINTMENT FOR VALERIE.

"CAPTAIN ST. ARNOUL," murmured the sleek domestic in a velvety voice, as he moved to one side, to permit the newly arrived visitor to enter.

The Duchess looked expectant still, and smiling as she advanced with outstretched hands to greet her cousin. But a moment longer undeceived her. The man she had waited for had not come.

A pallor, like grey ashes, crept over her face, and stole from it its radiant glow. Her eyes lost their seductive softness and warmth, and grew hard and cold. Yet her lips continued smiling with the forced society smile that courtesy demanded. "It is so good of you to come, Eric, but where is Sir Lewis Eastlake?"

"An accident has detained him, but he sent me on to explain."

"An accident—nothing serious, I trust? Antonio," this to the servant, who stood by, "take Captain St. Arnoul to his room. You have just time to dress before dinner, cousin, so I must wait to hear your news till afterwards. I take it that Sir Lewis will be here soon?"

"Oh, yes; in a few days, he hopes."

"Will you take tea?"

"No, thank you."

She was smiling upon her guest as he went out, while her dog Paris also shewed his teeth, in that unpleasant way dogs have of also smiling upon people they don't like. It was clear that Paris did not admire Captain Eric St. Arnoul, gentlemanly and well-groomed as he undoubtedly was.

Society young men are all so much alike now in their habits, costume, and mode of wearing their hair, that it is difficult to pick out the true from the counterfeit from the outside appearance. Captain St. Arnoul wore the recognised traveller's suit when he first appeared, and he would be back presently, clad in the orthodox, superior waiter's livery. He was tall and splendidly built, easy in his gestures, and subdued in his manners; pale-faced, and having good features he would be considered handsome, and moustachios of the same size and thickness that may be seen on nearly every young man about Pall Mall, Piccadilly, and Regent-street shaded his upper lip, while the rest of his face was clean shaved. Being black-haired, the shaven portion of his face had a bluish shade, which added to his general pallor. The eyes also were black and rather deep set, and while the forehead was narrow and sloping, the lower jaw looked heavy and somewhat grim in comparison; otherwise he had no particular characteristic to mark him from his fashion-stamped society friends at the first general glance.

It was a mighty disappointment to the young Duchess to find this substitute instead of the visitor she had waited so confidently for all day. She was not accustomed to disappointments, therefore she felt this one all the more acutely.

But still, Eric was here, who had been so lately and so often with *him*, therefore she could talk about this absent knight, if not with him, and that was at least something. A kind of reflection of the pleasure that was postponed.

She did not trouble greatly about the slight accident; her mind flew to the two letters, one of which she had put into the fire and the other into her bosom; she smiled as she thought it would most likely turn out to be the usual accident of a turf-loving young man—lack of money.

"Belwood has been too cautious, and put him off till my answer comes. Bother these penurious money-lenders!"

Nevertheless, although she was still hopeful, her maid found a difference in the lovely Duchess that evening to the gracious mistress of the afternoon. Before tea this handmaid had been praised for dexterity and good taste. To-night the Duchess called her stupid and clumsy, found fault with the dress which she had previously decided to wear, and by many other signs exhibited her disgust at outward Fate. The maid read the signs and swallowed her own resentment discreetly, as maids do who wait upon mistresses possessed of *nerves*.

"I wish Sir Lewis had come to-night!" murmured the maid inwardly and sadly, as she furtively watched her grace's discontented face. "Gentlemen ought to have consideration for the like of us, and try to keep their promises."

When the Duchess entered the reception room, she found her cousin standing with a chair between him and the snarling, lurid-eyed wolfhound. A footman

also was standing holding the dog back by his massive silver collar.

"Be quiet, Paris," she said, touching him on the head, then to the domestic: "Take him outside and chain him up; he does not appear to like the Captain."

The Captain grinned in a ghastly fashion as he replied: "I fancy it's the other way about, and that he is rather too fond of my person, for pure platonic comfort."

There was a slight family likeness between the cousins. Both were dark, only whereas she was fresh and vivid in her flashing loveliness, he was sallow, hard-featured, and a good deal worn by his experiences of life. She appeared three or four years younger than her actual age. He ten years older than he was, namely, twenty-seven. Innumerable minute crowsfeet wrinkles were round the deep-set, bistre-shaded eyes, a well-marked furrow swept from each nostril round the moustachios, while the narrow brow had a habit of moving into frowns and furrows. His ears also were large and outstanding, which took away all resemblance between the pair after the first look.

Notwithstanding these tell-tale evidences of a hard-spent life, Captain Eric St. Arnoul was a remarkably gentlemanly man of the Mephistophelian order. He had a ready smile, which revealed snow-white, even teeth. His eyes were brilliant if deep-set, and his voice soft and deep-toned.

When the door closed behind Paris and his keeper, the Duchess turned to her cousin and said curtly: "Well, Eric, and *why* has your friend Lewis not accompanied you?"

Eric St. Arnoul looked at his wealthy cousin anxiously. She had been his banker, and he her agent for some years now, therefore it was his interest not to raise her quick temper. He replied somewhat timidly: "The fact is, Valerie, Lewis lies at present wounded *slightly* at Cherbourg."

The Duchess fell back a step, and appeared for an instant as if about to faint. Then with a hoarse cry she leapt upon him, and clutching him fiercely by the arm, she glared upon him with flashing eyes. She was no longer the modern and refined lady, but the natural, savage woman.

"Wretch! You are deceiving me. He is dead. Quick—tell me—tell me if this true, oh! villain that you are!"

"Control yourself, for God's sake, Valerie. Lewis Eastlake is no more dead than I am, and with the exception of a broken collarbone, is otherwise as sound."

"How did it happen, and why is he at Cherbourg?"

The colour was coming back to her cheeks, and her eyes, although still flashing, had lost somewhat of their savage fury.

"He had a dispute with a club acquaintance, the result of which was a challenge and a run over to Cherbourg, where they met and planted a bullet in each other. Lewis received his in the shoulder, fortunately, and the other man in the left breast or thereabouts."

"Yes! and you saw him safe?"

"Of course, I was his second. He had an English doctor, who was an old friend of Lewis, now living at

Cherbourg. He removed the bullet, re-set the bone, and, like a good fellow, took him home to his own house, where I reckon he will be for the next week or ten days, in the best of hands."

"Ah!" she sighed with relief, and removed her grasp, while Eric wiped his face with his handkerherchief, as one who had got well over a nasty task. She did not ask how the man with the bullet in his chest had fared. If she thought of *him* at all, it was with hatred for having wounded the man she loved.

"And this doctor? Is he the best man to look after such a patient?"

"The very best, Valerie. Besides, all that is required will be rest for a few days. There is positively no danger for *Lewis*."

"Thank Heaven. Forgive me, Eric, my natural fears. You know my secret."

She was once again composed, yet considerably paler than before. Her eyes also now became dewy with emotion, and so lost their fire.

"Yes!" murmured Eric gently, looking at his cousin keenly. "Between your natural fears and your hound's natural anxiety to taste my calves, I feel decidedly at home in the Villa Idumea; and would sooner have faced a menagerie than the pair of you, if I carried any serious evil tidings."

At this moment the gong sounded for dinner, and offering his arm, upon which she again placed her hand, this time with the conventional light touch, he led her towards the door, which the retainer had now opened and was waiting at.

Half-way across the vast chamber she suddenly paused, and whispered in his ear:

"What was the quarrel about—a *woman?*"

"No! *Cards,*" he murmured softly under his moustache, with a gentle smile.

She was also smiling placidly, as they passed down the wide, high staircase, between the line of powdered, bent domestics, to the dining-room. She chatted gaily the small talk of their society, while he answered like the well-bred gentleman he was.

Throughout the dinner they chattered on about light and indifferent subjects, while the servants were present. Afterwards he rose when she did, and accompanied her to her cosy sitting-room, where, with coffee and cigarettes and the domestics excluded, they resumed their previous conversation.

The Duchess Valerie did not treat her cousin Eric with much more consideration than poor relations usually receive at the hands of those they are dependent upon. She was the patroness, and he the client. Neither was she troubled with much shyness in discussing her heart affairs with him.

He placed her footstool devotedly under her feet, and lit her cigarette, then he waited obediently for his instructions.

Although so soft-skinned and youthful-looking, anyone could see that she was the ruling mind. Not alone by reason of her position and wealth, but by the passionate directness and clear force of her character. With the man she was infatuated with, she might be yielding and weak, but not with her cousin Eric.

"Now, cousin, tell me exactly how that unfortunate quarrel took place; also if you were present, as I suppose you were, why did you not prevent it from going farther than words?"

Eric, the gentlemanly club-lounger and blackleg, told his story glibly. He placed all the blame on the other man, and prudently left out that it was his hand which had been originally challenged, while his hot-headed and chivalrous friend, Sir Lewis Eastlake, had drawn the dispute from him, and changed an ordinary club-room argument into an insult and a challenge. Not another intimate of Eric St. Arnoul would have interfered as Sir Lewis had done. They knew him too well.

He told her that he had tried his utmost to keep his friend out of it. But when wine is in, wit is out, and a blow in a club-room is too serious a matter, even at the end of the nineteenth century, for gentlemen to pass over with an apology. His hand was out, straight from the shoulder, and young Bingham on the carpet, before any one could interfere. "Like you, sweet cousin, Sir Lewis is apt to think afterwards.

"It was unfortunate, for you, as for him."

"I know," replied Eric, moodily. "You needn't remind me, Valerie, about it. I'd have given a lot to have prevented that meeting across the Channel. If you knew my condition of mind, when I saw those men facing each other, between the counting of the time and the firing, you'd have pitied me. By Jove! it felt as if the bullet had gone into my own carcass, when I saw Lewis fall backwards. I did not think of the other fellow, any more than you do now, although, from all I hear, his case is pretty critical. I only saw Lewis——"

"——and thought, doubtless, 'there goes my chance of an annuity,'" interrupted the Duchess Valerie, with compressed lips and sombre brown eyes. She was

looking at him; no longer the gentle lady, but with jaws almost as squarely defined as his own.

"Yes, I confess it, those were my thoughts," he answered, with a short, hard laugh. "The very best motive you could have for *me* to look after my charge. His life was the most precious thing I could think about, and I was as eager to save it, as you could be; perhaps more so——"

"No, Eric, not more so. His life is mine. I feel his wound in my neck now. Aye, in my heart as well," answered her grace, placing her hand on her left breast. "If he had been killed, I think I should have murdered *you* for not going between him and the fatal bullet. You know my sentiments. Bring this man to me, *for life*, and I will purchase you an annuity of five thousand—you say that will content you, Eric, therefore bring him to *me*. He is poor, and I have bought him up already, but I want his love—his heart. Not alone his hand."

She rose and swept out her lovely arms in a paroxysm of passion.

"I would conquer a world to win my love, my Lewis, my soul's desire. I have fixed my heart upon him, and him only. My heart, my soul, my life cry out for him. He loves me a little, I think. I know that he has friendship for me, and some admiration—all men admire me. You must bring him to me, Eric, and I will win him to myself."

Captain St. Ernoul looked at his beautiful young cousin with mild wonder and a feeble pity. Her gusts of passion seemed singularly primitive to his nineteenth century apathy. Her keen instinct and worldly acumen for a bargain also troubled his languid mind,

as much as it could be troubled. If she would only act consistently, he might know what to do ; but who could manage such a bundle of untutored nerves—a woman like Juliet and Cleopatra fused together one minute, and a financial, hard-headed broker the next?

"Ah!" she sighed deeply as she sank down again on her easy chair ; then looking up at his puckered brow, she burst out laughing.

"You are a sad failure, Eric. That Norman blood in your veins is degenerate. You can neither make bargains for yourself, nor hold on to what your hungry ancestors gripped for you. It has become thin and cold also, that ancient stream which once ran red and fierce, so that the holders of it cannot rise above paltry meannesses and small, cowardly vices. Now, what would you do if I gave you a cheque for five hundred pounds?"

"Do?" retorted the Captain, with sudden animation. "Why, go to Monte Carlo, and work my new system ; it's as safe as the bank——"

"Of Monte Carlo," interrupted Valerie, mockingly.

"As any bank, but it requires five hundred to work it properly."

"Exactly ; that was the sum your last system required to break the bank, and yet——"

Captain Eric flushed and gnawed at his moustache, on which his cousin again laughed.

"Never mind, cousin. I will not torment you any more for what you cannot help. Thanks to my half-Dutch mother and her Jewish father, I am able to spare you this five hundred to try your new system with. Only I want you to take me as far as Cherbourg and introduce the doctor who is attending to

Lewis; then, if his report is favourable, I shall run over to London and look after some business, while you go to Monte Carlo."

"You are a w[illegible]rful girl, Valerie. I wish you could teach me how to make money."

"No, I cannot teach you that, Eric; it is in my blood, as to spend recklessly is in yours. But I hope to be able to teach you one thing."

"What is that?"

"How to earn an annuity of five thousand pounds."

CHAPTER IV.

VALERIE GETS A SURPRISE.

THE Duchess Valerie was an unconventional young lady in most of her habits, and considerably advanced in her ideas of sex emancipation. Of course, however, because she was a duchess, instead of being a duke, and young and lovely instead of being old and commonplace-looking, she had several appendages to carry with her when she travelled—to wit, besides her other domestics, a highly-respectable silver-haired and sedate companion, whose maternal appearance satisfied society. That the young duchess paid as much heed to her sheep-dog, as if she had been a piece of needful furniture, did not matter. The patient sheep-dog was there, and that was the whole which society demanded.

On the evening that Captain St. Arnoul arrived, instead of Sir Lewis Eastlake, this *duenna* had been confined to her own apartment, with a sick headache. To have these headaches at certain times was as much a part of her duties as to look the acme of respectability, always, in or out of the presence of her grace.

The temperament of the Duchess, although apparently contradictory and dual, was by no means uncommon with astute and passionate natures. She was not at all impulsive, although headstrong and as persistent in her affections as she was cool, far-seeing and

determined in her calculations. When she made up her mind to a step in business she was not at all frightened at temporary losses or discouragements, but backed her own judgment, and, as she had almost unlimited wealth to back herself, she was able to brave the market and win.

An English aristocrat's daughter, on her father's side; on the mother's side she descended from a long line of Semitic money-makers. The lineage was doubtless much more ancient and pure than that of the Anglo-Norman gentleman, who was able to restore the splendour of his decayed estate with the shekels of the Oriental.

But the Dutch-Jew wife bestowed more upon her mild and courtly husband than those golden stores, when she gave him such a daughter. Full of vitality, imperious will and Eastern beauty, with the financial instincts of a Rothschild and the fervour of a savage child of Nature, she was a woman to admire in all her moods, respect a good deal, and fear just a little.

To Eric, her impecunious cousin, she exhibited the tigress side sometimes, therefore he respected her, with considerable dread. He admired her possessions vastly, yet he was not at all envious of her partiality for his friend Sir Lewis; on the whole, he much rather preferred to work for that modest annuity than to try the useless game of competing for the entire possessions with the hand of her grace into the bargain.

"She is a splendid type of womanhood, is Cousin Valerie," he thought as he watched her varied moods. "Something like what Cleopatra may have been when they unrolled her from the bale, to exhibit to Cæsar.

She is also a regular female Midas for making money; but for all that, I hope Lewis may take her. I'll be satisfied with a small slice of the golden apple."

The next day they departed for England, *viâ* Cherbourg—her grace to see if the man whom she honoured by loving was as safe and comfortable as money could make him; and her cousin to make all inquiries for her and take away the awkwardness of her going there. Her dog, her companion, maid, courier and other attendants also travelled with her grace, which proved to the natives of Cherbourg that some great personage had come to visit this naval stronghold.

Much as her grace would have liked to have rushed to the bedside of the wounded young man, this was one of the few actions she could not do by reason of her station. She had no right, as yet, to display more interest in his welfare than any ordinary acquaintance. This was forced upon her painfully, while she waited in the hotel, all impatience on the return of her cousin. At his advice she had curbed her own impulse and sent him where she would fain have flown herself.

No. This friendship had not been very pronounced in the past. Sir Lewis had been kind, flattering and politely attentive. But then she had been his friend's wife, and as an honourable man he could not shew any more at that time.

They had corresponded, as society people do, both before and after the death of the Duc. But as she now remembered, it was not Sir Lewis who commenced the correspondence, and his letters were all replies.

"Oh! no matter," she muttered, biting her red lips. "Let him say afterwards, if he likes, that I courted him.

He has no other entanglement Eric tells me, so that my chances are good now, and I'll watch that no one comes between us."

Her chances were good now that these many letters had made the writers familiar enough to call each other by their Christian names. Letters are rare propinquity-promoters, as well as good breach of promise evidences. If a man once yields to answer the points in a lady's letters he need not be astonished if matrimony be the result.

If her watcher, Eric St Arnoul, was right, and his deluded friend had no other love affair on hand, her chances were almost certainties. Her beauty, youth, ardour, keen wit, and vast wealth held out as the baits to a young man stony-broke and in disgrace, it wanted only one other feather-weight to turn the scale in her favour. That feather-weight was given to her within the next few minutes.

Dr. Waldred returned with her cousin. He was a grave, pale-faced, and plain-looking man of about thirty-five, with grey eyes. He had a good professional air and manner, and looked exactly what he was—a hard worker.

His house was a little way out of the town, and here he had taken his patient, partly to look after him, and partly to screen him from unpleasant inquiries.

His report respecting Sir Lewis was favourable, but his adversary was mortally wounded, and although not yet dead, his hours were numbered.

"We can depend upon the witnesses being as discreet as possible, your grace, but we cannot avoid inquiries now that this affair is ending fatally. Mr. Bingham's friends have been apprised of his condition, and I fear

that Cherbourg will not be a safe hiding-place for Sir Lewis Eastlake."

"How soon can he be removed with safety?" asked the Duchess calmly.

"In two or three days from now," replied the doctor. "He only requires nursing—he hardly requires medical help."

"Have you a good, discreet nurse, Dr. Waldred?"

"Yes, my sister is looking after him, and I can depend on her discretion more than upon that of a stranger."

The Duchess Valerie looked at the unattractive, but clever face of Dr. Waldred, and had a mental portrait of his sister thrown up within her mind. She saw there a woman of the Aunt Jane type, some years older than the doctor, with faded eyes, sallow complexion, and thin, ungraceful figure. A kind, attentive and capable nurse, and as safe as a mother might be with her patient. She was satisfied with the image that her own mind conjured up and photographed.

"Good," she said. "I have an estate at Falaise, which is very healthy, with a comfortable château. There he would be safe for a time, and he could be taken by carriage perhaps sooner than you say—if your sister could accompany him."

"Yes, my sister will be pleased to do so. I shall also see that he is safe on the way by going with them. In this case he can take the journey to-morrow."

"Then it is arranged. I have to go to London on some urgent business with my English agent, but my cousin here will act as host during my absence. I move about a great deal, therefore my houses are

always prepared for me or visitors. Eric, you will attend to this, I know."

Filled with her self-conjured vision of that skilful, but elderly and plain-faced, sister of the homely-looking doctor ; full, also with her benevolent projects towards the beloved invalid, who to-morrow would be under her roof, the young Duchess was in her most gracious and happy mood.

She resisted the desire to see him before she left, in case that her visit to the doctor's house would attract too much attention. A duchess is not like a dairymaid. She cannot steal out to visit her lover without comment, and all Cherbourg knew already who she was, thanks to the landlord whose hotel she patronized.

He was not in danger, and she was going to England entirely on his account. When that business was settled she would return and take him in hand. She wrote out the cheque for Eric which she had promised him, and a note for the housekeeper, which she also gave her cousin to deliver.

"You will wait for my return before you go to the Riviera, Eric," she observed, and her cousin replied cheerfully :

"Of course."

He anticipated pleasant enough times at Falaise, dull as it was. He had been there before and knew that there was good shooting on the estate, and he knew likewise that his cousin would not be long in relieving him of his duty.

A little seclusion just at present was as needful almost for him as it was for his wounded friend. There would be a wild outcry amongst the relations of

the dying man, and plenty of kind club friends to give them both away. Yes, Falaise would serve nicely just now, and after that he might lose himself for a time among the crowd at Monte Carlo until this storm blew over.

Captain Eric St. Arnoul chuckled gently to himself as he thought about the numerous unpaid debts that he had left behind. It was not often he had as good an excuse for forgetting to settle them.

Therefore having arranged with Dr. Waldred about the time that he would arrive with his patient, he cheerfully saw the Duchess and her retinue into the train for Calais, and departed himself for Falaise.

By a singular chain of circumstances, he had not yet seen the sister of the doctor, and not being blessed with an active imagination, he thought nothing at all about her. When he had assisted his friend from the field to the doctor's house she had been from home; and that morning when he made his second visit, the invalid was asleep, so that he had been advised not to disturb him. That night, as he sat smoking and reconsidering his new system after dinner, he felt as sure about that annuity as he was about the present cheque.

"By Jove! Eastlake is too desperately smashed up to be able to resist the shekels of Valerie even if her personal attractions fail to fascinate him. Thanks to my constant hints, he ought to know already how completely gone she is on him; therefore, there is not much more for me to do except to let events take their natural course."

Her Grace the Duchess Valerie sped over to England filled with the same happy and confident hopes. As

soon as possible she interviewed her astute City agent, Mr. Stephen Bellwood, and went closely into matters with him. Sir Lewis Eastlake was a ruined man, and worse, for unless she came to his rescue he would also be utterly dishonoured.

It was not her policy to see him reduced to this extremity; therefore, she gave instructions to this company promoter and money-lender to pay all his debts at once, both personal and debts of honour. This took some time to accomplish, for the agent had to proceed cautiously.

At last it was done, the agent satisfied with his profit, and the Duchess was ready to return to the man she loved and intended to marry, with his future fate in her hands. On her alone depended whether he was to be a homeless, penniless vagabond, or once more wealthy and respected amongst his kind.

She resolved to keep these transactions secret from him meanwhile. He must still be left to think himself ruined and in danger of dishonour. These motives would urge him to exertion.

"Now to win his heart, if I can," she murmured passionately; "and if not that, yet at least his hand. I'll force him to love me afterwards even if I fail to do so now."

He was safe at her chateau at present, removed from all temptations and tidings of the outer world. She would keep him there a prisoner to love until the wedding day was fixed.

She sent a telegram to announce her coming, and then followed it as fast as an express train and mail packet could carry her.

It was evening when she arrived at Falaise, and she

could see she was expected. Her cousin met her at the station, and drove her to the château. Flushed with her journey, and superbly lovely with hope and eager confidence, she swept through the hall and into the apartment, where they told her the invalid was waiting for her with the nurse.

Her glowing dark eyes fell on him first as she sprang forward with the happy word on her lips:

"Lewis."

Then she started and became rigid as the nurse rose from a chair and faced her.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE GLOAMING.

THERE was nothing particularly striking in the lady who faced the Duchess, beyond the fact that she was a lady, and young, instead of being, as her grace had supposed, elderly.

She was young, fair-haired, unmistakably graceful in her figure and movements, but rather pale-faced and wearied-looking with her late vigil.

The Duchess looked at the other with frozen astonishment for a moment, then she resumed her presence of mind and advanced smilingly towards the invalid. "I did not expect to find you up yet, Lewis."

Sir Lewis Eastlake reclined against some soft cushions, and looked wan and troubled. He could not yet move without assistance, but he smiled faintly as he raised his left hand slowly. He had been hit in the right shoulder, therefore could not raise that side.

"Thanks to your goodness, Valerie, and the care my friend here has taken of me, I was able to sit up and welcome you home."

"How do you do, Miss Waldred? Do you know, you have surprised me greatly?"

"Why, your grace?" asked the young lady quietly, in a sweet, soft voice.

The Duchess laughed a little foolishly as she an-

swered: "Well, I expected to find a lady of more mature age, or I should hardly have trusted you with such a charge."

"I am twenty-three, and have had a good deal of experience in nursing, madam."

"Forgive me my first surprise, my dear Miss Waldred. I can see from your tired expression that you have devoted yourself to your duty. Now that I have come, however, I shall be able to help you."

With a few more of the words which social politeness dictated, the Duchess left the room to prepare for dinner; as she withdrew she placed her hand on the arm of Captain St. Arnoul, who waited near the door, and took him with her. She walked with him, smiling but silent, until they reached her dressing-room door, then she turned suddenly and fairly hissed in his startled ears:

"Fool! Why did you not tell me before I left Cherbourg that Miss Waldred was a young woman?"

"Because I didn't know, Valerie," stammered the poor blackleg. "How could I when I had not seen her?"

"I suppose not," she sneered viciously. "You never seem to see anything outside a pack of cards or a roulette table. I expect that you have spent the past week mooning about my estate with a gun and a dog, while that young woman has been amusing your friend. That's the way to win an annuity, isn't it?"

"Why, Valerie, you don't mean to say that you are going to be jealous of that doctor's colourless sister? Why, she is nothing more in his estimation than the housekeeper! She hardly speaks a word; besides, only to-day when your wire came, she announced her

pleasure at your return, as she can now get back to Cherbourg?"

"Is this certain, Eric?"

"On my honour as a gentleman," replied her cousin calmly.

"Good; I will relieve her of her duty, she may depart to-morrow. You are right; she looks a cold-blooded thing, with her sickly face and washed-out eyes. I pardon you this time, Eric, only I wish she had been older. Never mind, I will trust your word that there is no damage done to—your prospects."

When the door was closed behind the Duchess and Eric St. Arnoul, the lady nurse went quickly over to the couch where Sir Lewis Eastlake reclined, and bending over him she whispered: "O Lewis! why did you persuade me to do this thing? I have ruined you, for the Duchess loves you and would have freed you from all your troubles, but for me."

"Nonsense, Hope; the Duchess may have a slight *penchant* toward me, but she will fly at much higher game for her next mate. You have made me pretty vain by giving your heart to such a ruined, dissolute beggar as I am, but there is a limit to my conceit. No, dearest; her grace is good-natured, kind-hearted, and fond of a little harmless flirtation, but it is a prince at the least who will induce her to change her present title."

He spoke reassuringly, as he fondled her hand in his left one; yet she was not convinced.

"You are wrong, Lewis; women are never deceived in those matters as men sometimes are. When the Duchess entered this room, I saw the true love light in her eyes, and I also saw something else when she

stopped and looked at me. You have missed a great chance, you foolish, foolish boy."

The invalid laughed faintly as he replied: "It has always been my fate to throw away chances, all except one, which I prize more than an El Dorado. That chance I caught in a hurry the evening before my duel. Do you regret it, Hope?—my Hope—the Hope that may yet help me to conquer the fortune I have so rashly flung away."

"No, my darling, I shall never regret the step I took that night, except for your sake. But—you must tell your hostess all—without delay, and I must go home to my brother's, for I cannot stay in this house, under false colours."

She stooped and kissed him lightly on the lips, then passed her fingers through his hair. She was no longer a pallid-faced woman, but a blushing girl, with lovely humid, moist blue eyes, in which hung unshed tears.

"Yes, perhaps you had better return to Cherbourg, until I break the news, my dear. Meantime, I think I shall go to bed."

She became the careful nurse once more at this request, and ringing the bell, two of the male servants came in and assisted him to his feet, and up to his bedroom.

* * * * * *

That night as the Duchess Valerie looked at herself in the mirror, and contrasted her matchless symmetry and flashing beauty with the points of her temporary guest, she gave a sigh of supreme satisfaction. Although not too tall for grace, she was nearly two inches taller than Miss Waldred, which gave her a

vast advantage in dress, pose, and walking qualities. Both young ladies were slender and lithesome, but the widow was younger than the maiden, freer in her actions, as well as more accomplished and wittier. Valerie had the exquisite freshness of a blush rose, while Hope looked like a faded lily beside her.

In every way she surpassed the doctor's shy sister; in features as well as in form; in the mass and length of her tresses—she had artfully coaxed the nurse into her chamber before retiring in order to study her carefully. She had persuaded Hope to unfasten her hair so that she might judge how long and thick it was, and felt content with the result of her investigation.

Her momentary jealousy and fears were groundless. There could be positively no danger in the presence of that insignificant stranger, while *she* was there, to extinguish with her overpowering lustre the other's feeble prettiness. Indeed she would have been sorry, only that she desired the field entirely to herself, that Hope was leaving so soon, she made such a capital foil.

Under the circumstances however she did not press her guest very warmly to extend her visit. Sir Lewis was out of all danger and the fracture was almost mended. He no longer required night watching, and another week's rest would make him as strong as ever. The Duchess felt really grateful now to this girl for the care she had taken of the invalid, and was hurt that the present of jewellery which she tried to force upon her was gently but firmly refused.

"I have only done my duty to an old friend," said Hope, as she declined the proffered gifts.

"Have you known Sir Lewis long?"

"Since we were children. We were neighbours, and my brother was his first tutor in chemistry and botany."

"Indeed!" The Duchess, in her infatuation and sense of superiority, did not feel at all uneasy to learn this. Of course, Lewis must have many old friends that she knew nothing about yet. A glance at her mirror convinced her that he could have no old friends who could compete with her. What man could pass over those blue-black rippling tresses, fragrant and silky, for such light-brown stuff as that? Who could gaze into her velvety dark orbs and forget them in such colourless eyes? She was made for love, and the other, with her mild, irregular comeliness for what she said herself—passionless duty.

Hope read this favoured child of Fortune and Nature like an open book as she watched her quietly and seriously; she read her infatuation and her self-complacency with commiseration, even while she wondered that she had been preferred to this rich and lovely girl. So far Hope read, because the Duchess was revealing the childish side of her nature. But what was hidden at this time—the intensity, keenness and passionate depth of the early-developed woman—fortunately for the peace of mind of Hope, she went away without being able to plumb.

Doubtless, when all was going well with the love affairs of Lucretia Borgia in her youth, she appeared a very charming and innocent young lady even to her own sex.

The following morning Hope departed to Cherbourg, and in the afternoon Captain Eric St. Arnoul went his way to have a short but merry fling at the

tables of Monte Carlo. He apologised profusely to his friend for leaving him at this time, put on a sad air and spoke about a man he had to arrange business with in Paris—the usual business, cash raising. Sir Lewis excused him, for he also was meditating very seriously about where and how he could do the same description of business.

The next few days were very happy ones for the young and enamoured Duchess. Every day the baronet recovered strength under her generous and tender treatment, and very soon he was able to spend the day with her, and drive about the country. He had heard of his antagonist's death, and while this filled him with deep remorse, he knew that England was no place for him. He must seek fortune elsewhere.

He had written to his solicitor for a statement of his affairs, and also to Mr. Stephen Belwood to see if he could have any further advances.

His lawyer's reply settled his mind respecting England. He was no longer a landed proprietor, nor, indeed, was he a proprietor of anything. The mortgagee had foreclosed and seized everything. His name had been struck off the books of the Calydon Club, and to all intents and purposes he was an outcast.

"It's Columbia, if I can raise the necessary funds," he muttered. "I wonder what Belwood will say."

Stephen Belwood proved to be more generous than Sir Lewis expected. He offered to advance him five thousand more on condition that Sir Lewis could find a good security to back his bill.

The Duchess had arranged this with her agent. Intending to get Eric to find a bogus name to

soothe the scruples of his trusting friend, she had meant to instruct Eric on this matter, guessing that the two friends would most likely consult together.

But, having no money difficulties of her own, in her joy at having Lewis all to herself she had allowed Eric to depart without telling him anything about it.

If she had done so affairs might have been different. As it was, however, the baronet would have considered the debt-burdened and impecunious Eric St. Arnoul's name as the very last to have on the back of a bill as security. Had the blackleg been at Falaise Sir Lewis would have shewn him the money-lender's offer and discussed the matter. But he was away, therefore the ruined young spendthrift had only his own thoughts to fall back upon.

These were gloomy and perplexing thoughts which occupied his mind, morning, noon and night.

He never thought of making a confidante of his charming hostess. He could not have accepted her aid; her sex precluded any idea of that. Only one man could help him now, and it seemed too base to draw that man in, with his unlikely prospects and the other's circumscribed means. This was his old friend and the brother of Hope, Dr. Waldred.

How bitterly the landless baronet now regretted his former mad extravagance. We generally regret those giddy times when it is too late.

He was so preoccupied and gloomy with these heavy thoughts that all the charming wiles and open hints of the Duchess were completely wasted. Chance after chance she gave him without avail. The most obtuse of intellects must have taken up the least of her obvious suggestions, but Sir Lewis still remained

blind. Long drives were wasted. Walks in sheltered and lovely groves ended without avail. They had days and evenings of constant intercourse, and still they were only friends as before, she the openly adoring, and he the gloomily indifferent.

At last, just when she had made up her mind to take the place of the man and rescue him in spite of himself, he resolved to tell her something of what he had been keeping back.

It was that witching hour when daylight is fading and people generally feel impelled to speak their secrets—that half-hour before the lamps are lit. They had been sitting together at the window of the drawing-room, and outside the red-leaved woods were sombre and dark. They had both been silent for some time; she trying to shape plain words without quite losing her sex's privilege, he also thinking on what he had to tell her.

At last he spoke in a husky voice that thrilled her through and through. It seemed to her that passion alone could make him so hoarse.

"Valerie, I have a confession to make to you. Will you listen to me?"

"Yes, Lewis," she murmured softly, getting closer to him on the couch.

At this moment the servant appeared to light the lamps. Valerie sprang up impatiently and cried: "I shall ring when we want light."

CHAPTER VI.

DESPAIR.

"YES, I'd rather speak in this dusk," said Sir Lewis, as the servant retired and Valerie sank once more beside him.

She was trembling with delicious suspense. Her heart throbbing as it had never before throbbed, while in her soul an angel's voice seemed to sing of joy unutterable by mortal tongue. It was a moment to live up to, for she was being wafted beyond all lesser joys of life. Her lover was about to tell her the thing which every fibre within her yearned to hear.

"You are cold, my dear friend," he said as he placed his hand on hers.

"No, no, I am not cold. Tell me what you have to say, Lewis, I am listening."

She clasped his hand and held it firmly between both of hers. She was too hungry to play any coy woman's tricks. He had kept her too long on tenter-hooks. He must speak now and end all uncertainty. Her heart must be satisfied to-night, or she felt she must perish.

It was the one supreme moment of her life; the moment which would make her his slave for ever and bid her best instincts blossom out into benevolent and gracious deeds, or else plunge her into hell. Sir Lewis Eastlake was, and had always been, a reckless, easy-

going young man. He had made ducks and drakes of his paternal estates, and of his best friends. He thought he had set his back on all his former rashness, and meant now to turn over a new leaf and begin life earnestly and straight, but he didn't know what he was about to do now, and that must be his excuse.

"Valerie, I know that you are my friend, and I think you like me just a little."

"Like you a little, Lewis? Oh!"

She almost sobbed that "Oh!" as she pressed his hand closer between hers. He felt the mesmeric thrill that passed from her over him, but, like the obtuse young Englishman he was, it did not enlighten him. He went on in a clearer voice, as one resolved to get over an unpleasant duty.

"I told you in my last letter that I was badly hit in money matters, but I did not quite know at the time that I was a ruined man."

"What does that matter, Lewis, *now?* Go on."

"Everything to me, my dear Valerie, for I am a beggar."

"Again I say, what matter? You can marry, and your wife will make you rich."

"No, she cannot, for she is about as poor as I am."

"What?" The exclamation broke from her shrill, sharp and discordant.

He had blurted it out at last. The rest would be easy for him, he thought.

The hands which clasped his tightened for an instant, so fiercely that he winced, then all at once they relaxed while Valerie fell inertly against him. Two rapid heart-beats was all the time this kindly

stroke of oblivion lasted, yet she seemed to have been dead for centuries.

So brief a space had it been that her companion, engrossed in his own embarrassment, never noticed that she had lost consciousness, neither did he feel the dead weight which, for the two seconds, pressed so heavily against his arm. He was contemplating the wording of his story, and suffering dreadful awkwardness in the gathering of it together. Not that he was at all ashamed or repentant of the part he had played. Neither did he believe that the Duchess meant more than a passing flirtation by her attentions to him; yet there were features about the affair which made him decidedly uncomfortable.

It is not easy for a man to tell a woman who has shewn some preference for him, even although nothing serious is meant, that he has married another within the past fortnight or three weeks. There is a sneaking feeling that he has wronged the woman somehow beside him, and that she has cause to accuse him of trifling with her. Also, although this was not his fault, he began to feel that his brother-in-law ought to have informed the Duchess that Hope was his wife when he suggested her as his nurse. He was blaming himself for having delayed the declaration so long; clearly he ought to have introduced the ladies properly the first moment they met. It was a mean and humiliating crisis he was facing now—a deception that he was trying to explain.

As for Valerie, that momentary surcease had altered her whole nature. Her heart no longer throbbed tumultuously, but lay cold and dead in her bosom. An icy calm also rested upon her brain. She could

not quite grasp yet the full import of his words, for a dull torpor was holding her passions and senses, yet she was able to hear and partly understand what he said. It seemed as if she had been reborn and was listening to a past Sir Lewis, speaking, with measured words, to the corpse of a long since slaughtered Valerie.

That this Valerie had been bitterly deceived, whether by herself or some one else, she understood clearly enough. Singularly also this knowledge awoke neither passion, indignation, nor hatred, *as yet*, only wondering curiosity to learn the whole details before she could leave his side. A dull numbness, almost like peace, was on her as she sat touching him and listening silently, the numbness that first follows a mortal stab, before the knife has been withdrawn.

"You will forgive me, Valerie, my friend, for not telling you about this sooner, but as events happened, it was not easy to do so," he began awkwardly.

"Yes, yes, Lewis; tell me all about it."

Her voice sounded low and thickly, and she uttered the words with some difficulty.

"It was in this way. Hope and I have been engaged for ever so long. I meant to marry her as soon as I had seen a little life, but I plunged much deeper into the vortex than I expected. The end came and I was ruined through those confounded money-lenders.

"Only one thing was left me: I had insured my life heavily before I lost all. Then came that quarrel at the club, and the challenge. I was desperate and low-spirited, and seemed to have a presentiment that I should be killed, so as Hope was by no means independent, I thought it would benefit her if I married her before I met my man."

The business faculties of the Duchess remained clear, if her other senses were stunned, for she replied quickly:

"No insurance company would pay for a death of this kind."

"I did not think of that at the time; I purchased a special license before leaving that day for Cherbourg, and persuaded Hope to marry me that same evening at the British Consul's house."

"Did her brother know of this?"

"Yes; he was one of the witnesses."

"Ah, and who else?"

"Only the housekeeper of Dr. Waldred."

He was not a little gratified to find her taking his confession so coolly.

"Why did you not take my cousin into your confidence?"

He did not answer; the real reason he could not have explained to her, that his respect, as far as women were concerned, for Eric, was not as great as his liking for him and faith as regards other matters. Valerie did not repeat her question.

"Then you are undoubtedly married, and to the—lady I thought was only your nurse. Excuse me saying more about it now, as it is too late to advise. I shall think it over best by myself. Ring for lights after I have gone."

She rose and glided from him through the darkness. He hardly knew she had left him until he heard the rustle of her dress at the other end of the room.

"Ah!" he sighed with relief. "That is over at last, thank Heaven, and Hope was wrong to fancy

Valerie cared any more for me than as an ordinary friend."

Half his troubles were removed now that the Duchess knew about his latest plunge. The money was still to be raised to give him a fresh start in life, but on that matter he would consult with his brother-in-law, and let him decide.

He drew a cigarette from his case, and lighting it, strolled out to the terrace, to pick up an appetite for dinner. It was a mild night for that time of the year, and if Nature was dying, she was dying gently. The terrace was carpeted with fallen leaves, but the trees were not yet denuded, and a fresh smell of newly-turned earth pervaded the cool air.

He dined that night alone, as her grace sent him word that she was not well, and begged to be excused. After dinner he wrote to his wife and informed her about his interview, and how quietly it had terminated. Then he went off to bed, to think before he fell asleep, where the name was to come from to back what he resolved would be his last bill.

Sir Lewis, if a thoughtless, was not altogether a selfish fellow; indeed, it was the utter lack of self-conceit that rendered him so obtuse on this occasion. He never before had known what it was to face poverty. He had always been able to fill his purse when he wanted money, and those sacrifices which he made on paper had never, until now, come so close as to be too unpleasant. What he might yet have to endure was unknown, and therefore unfelt at present.

As long as the apprentice to poverty has some gold in his pocket, the best of meat, drink and tobacco to partake of and a superfluous wardrobe to select from,

he is apt to look with but languid interest on the waiting and hungry wolf.

Like the young bears, all Sir Lewis's troubles lay before him. He was unable to understand the wrong he had done to that weak, loving girl at Cherbourg, and Nature had not given him the instinct to know what he had done to Valerie.

The Duchess crept noiselessly to her chamber, and after dismissing her maid, with a gentleness which greatly astonished that personage, she locked herself in.

Her training had been that of an English lady, but the blood that now lay stagnant at her heart was Eastern, and she instinctively did what her foremothers, the daughters of Jerusalem, must have done in their woe and desolation. She crouched down upon the carpet and let her long black tresses fall about her like an inky pall.

Hours passed, and still she sat motionless and buried beneath that black cloud; her hands clasped over her drawn-up knees, and her chin resting upon them. For a time the fire-light played fitfully over that shapeless form, until it gradually died out and left the room in utter darkness. For long hours, before her burning eyeballs the words which Sir Lewis had told her shone like letters of fire, that were eating into her dazed brain and searing all other sensations. Then slowly consciousness woke up, the consciousness that her lover had been decoyed from her by that pale-faced rival whom she had despised.

The night was almost spent before this consciousness came, but when it did, her heart began to glow again, and as the heated blood surged into her seared brain, she began to think and plot.

Her mad love for the man still remained, for she was of a race, on the mother's side, that never relinquished a desire until it was gratified. It was no longer the fresh and innocent love of yesterday, however, that had prompted her to generous thoughts, but a devouring flame, fed by the most savage hatred towards those who had robbed her of him.

The crafty and patient guile of that Oriental race that now dominated her, leapt into full force in these last hours of her vigil. Round and round in circles her mind flew like a vulture about its victim, now soaring wide, now circling closer as she watched and brooded upon her revenge.

At last she sprang to her feet and flung the shrouding hair from her face with a wild, exultant cry. What a demoniac face that was which the morning light fell upon as she drew up the blind. Grey as that of a corpse with baleful, glittering eyes.

"I have it! Stephen Belwood must come and induce the brother-in-law of Lewis to back that bill; then let Lewis go where he wants meantime, until I have accomplished the ruin of those who have stolen my most precious treasure. I shall drive them to starvation, to shame and death, even though it cost half my fortune to do this. Ah, Lewis, you shall be mine yet, even although I have to wait some time longer for my prize."

She hastily disrobed herself, and pouring out some chloral into a glass, she drank, and then lying down soon fell into a deep sleep.

It was late in the afternoon before she appeared to her guest, and if there were some dark shadows under her eyes, this did not detract greatly from her exquisite

loveliness. Her manner was kind, caressing and sisterly, and she encouraged him to speak all about himself and his young bride. The clumsy fellow was delighted at this sympathy, and opened his heart freely to her inspection.

"I am glad you have confided in me, Lewis, at last, for now I can act as a sister to you and to—your wife."

He had told her about the money-lenders and his intentions respecting going to North America.

"Yes, there is every prospect of success, in those regions if you go well provided; and since you will not let me be your banker, you cannot prevent me from using my influence to getting you a post as superintendent for one of the companies which are forming. Meantime, as you must still keep yourself quiet, best remain here for the winter at Falaise, with Lady Eastlake, while you make your preparations, and also send for your money-lender to come here. I shall go to Italy, so that you may be entire master here, while you remain."

It was a most generous offer, which Sir Lewis accepted after a protest. He could not well refuse either, even although he was eager to begin these arrangements at once, when she asked just to let her have two or three more days with him at Falaise for the sake of old friendship, before he commenced his new life.

Ah, those three last days, when this woman, young, beautiful and now utterly unscrupulous, put forth all her wily arts to fascinate him and make his heart a traitor to duty.

She feigned the *rôle* of a sister, and claimed all a

sister's privileges. She was bold, tender and insidious; full of inventions to amuse and interest him as only such a woman could be.

As a sister she could now stroke his hair, kiss him, lean over him and against him, indulge in a thousand artlessly artful tricks that were trivial in themselves yet alluring and deadly; she shewed him her love and her regret so plainly now, that he wondered he had not guessed it before; then she forgave him his blindness with such sweet *abandon* that his head and heart throbbed with fever.

Yet through all this he was true to his wife, or thought he was; but when the Duchess drove away with a last tearful and despairing embrace, he felt like a guilty cur. The poison of those melting and flashing dark eyes rankled in his heart all through that winter, and for many a day afterwards. Yet he tried to console himself with the thought that his love was still the same for gentle Hope, and that he had been staunch and true to her.

CHAPTER VII.

IN DAWSON CITY.

IT was nearly the end of February, in Dawson City, Yukon District, and the inhabitants were in a high state of jubilation.

This was not on account of a new gold region being discovered in the Yukon Valley. Discoveries of this kind were too commonplace to raise the city to this pitch of excitement and joy. It was because an enterprising ex-cowboy speculator from Texas had succeeded in making the winter trail from Wrangel on the Stikine River, and so brought relief to the well-nigh starved-out community.

Bill Sykes was the cognomen of this ex-cowboy, when in society and on his dignity; Knify Jerk, amongst his free and noble companions of the lariat and the revolver, because of the masterly style in which he could *jerk* or pitch his knife into a man twenty yards distant. "Jerk," his bosom friends called him for short.

He had been the special pride of the ranche for years past, always ready to head a playful expedition against the Apaches, or in a raid on some of their peace-loving neighbours. Riding like demons through the streets of the nearest village, emptying their revolvers right and left as they rode along, with a fine disregard for life; wrecking drinking saloons, torturing

tenderfeet and doing the countless other free and chivalrous deeds which the gallant American cowboys are so conceited about doing, and which make them such a respected and dearly-loved section of the glorious West. In preparing for such little outings Bill always provided himself with a lavish supply of sharp-pointed knives and never grudged giving them away, hence his picturesque sub-title.

Although his companions were one and all proud of him and his high-spirited exuberance, Bill had found it necessary to shift his camp and seek pastures fresh after an epoch-making career down south. At this time the Klondike fever had seized upon him. Promptly *borrowing* some gold-dust from a successful mining stranger, whom he chanced to meet on the trail as he was riding for his life, he started north. The marshal and his men found the corpse of the miner hours afterwards, with one of Bill's tell-tale knives in his back, but the gay cowboy was beyond capture by that time.

If the absence of "Jerk" was regretted down Texas way his timely arrival in Dawson City was hailed with the wildest delight. He had laid out that borrowed gold-dust in provisions and cattle, carried the cattle along as far as he could, and afterwards hired reindeer sledges and Indians, and brought his store intact up to the Yukon.

He was the hero of the hour, and likely to be one of the wealthiest men in the city; besides, what he traded in was worth practically whatever he liked to ask for it.

The miners, driven by cold and hunger into the city, were pretty well at the mercy of this Texan bravado. They had devoured all the tinned meat and salted pork; beans and flour were only to be had now by the

very successful. They had whisky, gin, and rum, or, at least, the raw spirits that had been christened those names, at little more than summer prices. Tobacco had risen to six times its former rates. The Indians who hung about the settlement were still able to bring in some fish from the larger frozen rivers and creeks by keeping blow-holes open. But this was not a dependable supply, and fish, without any other kitchen, even Klondike salmon, became nauseating food when taken constantly.

Stomachs yearned with an unutterable yearning for a change of diet, as well as a greater supply of food. Then, when they took *delirium tremens* in Dawson City, they saw animated beef-steaks and agile Irish stews dangling in front of them and eluding their grasp, instead of snakes and varied-coloured imps. Women had their love visions and tender haunting memories, but these visions and memories were about former breakfasts, dinners, and suppers, no longer about men.

They had come, both men and women, to seek for gold, and they had found it in such quantities that they could not have believed had they been told of it. Those lucky enough to possess claims were the leaders of society now, and did not mind paying whatever was asked, since their prospects were unlimited.

Those who were not so lucky, still had made small piles during the summer by working for wages, and were ready to spend what they had earned, in order to be kept alive during the next three months. They could always get work, winter or summer, at twenty dollars a day when they liked to work.

Grub, not gold, had been the serious consideration of the past months, and now that this Texas adventurer

had brought the one thing needful to the small city, he was fêted, humoured and adored. They stood him drinks, even beyond his rumoured capacity of thirst, and presented him with handfuls of nuggets. Women, old, middle-aged and young, smiled upon him as the Royal Duke of Edinburgh was smiled upon by the fair sex of Australia during his first visit to the Antipodes.

It was enough to turn the head of any man, this open cupboard adoration, but it did not turn the level brains of Texas Jerk. He had come to Klondike to do a stroke of business, and he meant to do it. He accepted the drinks, nuggets and sugary smiles with calm dignity, as his due for undergoing the hardships of that winter journey in order to succour Dawson City, but he wasn't going to part with a single pound of frozen beef or flour without its equivalent. He was a trader, not a soft-headed philanthropist.

Having packed his stock in one of the empty stores placed at his disposal, he was now regaling himself at the bar of one of the most fashionable saloons. He had emptied an appalling number of glasses since his arrival, even in the eyes of the Dawson City soakers, but without apparent effect upon him. He was as calm, collected, and as pronounced in his nasal drawling accent as ever. Laconic in his replies to those who inquired about his adventures by the way, he could not be charged with being a boaster. For this reticence the men were disposed to like him.

He was drinking at present with a half-dozen of the mounted police who had dropped into the saloon. They were all fine, strong, hardy men, as, indeed, were the majority of the company present. Only the strong men had survived the winter, the weaklings had gone under.

Madge Bowman, the daughter of the landlord, acted as bar-keeper. She was a Canadian girl, who had been born and brought up amongst the severe snows of Upper Canada, and, therefore, thought but little of a temperature of sixty-four degrees below zero outside. The saloon was well heated, at least sufficiently heated to feel almost too hot for those fur-clad loungers.

Madge was a good-looking buxom girl, who was in the happy condition of being engaged to one of the most successful diggers. She, therefore, could spend her smiles and glances without being misunderstood by those who received them. Her lover, a young stalwart fellow of about twenty-six, was at present making himself useful in washing glasses and obeying orders for fresh drinks. Madge measured out the quantity, while he handed the drinks round.

There was nothing decorative about this saloon except, perhaps, rosy-cheeked Madge herself, and the picturesque costume of the visitors. Each one had made a fashion for himself in the shape and trimming of his furs and skins. The mounted police were the most uniform, but as for the others, they had all sorts of tags, tails and adornments hanging to their leggings and wide-sleeved coats.

The only person present whom Madge was not intimately acquainted with was the new arrival, "Jerk," therefore, woman-like, she was inclined to devote her attentions exclusively to him.

Forms and rough-hewn benches ranged along the massive plank wall. In the centre of the mud-baked floor stood a covered stove, which gave out a great heat for a few feet. Over the inner door hung a heavy bear-skin to keep out the keen air.

There were two doors, with a small passage between, and both the inner and the outer doors were protected by these warm hangings of skin. There was no other ventilation to this room except the door, nor was any other required, for, as customers entered and swung aside the furs, they brought sufficient frigidity with them to freeze the beards of those standing nearest the exit. Windows were only used in summer in Dawson City. In the winter they were hermetically sealed and shuttered. It was a long night of months, so that none expected windows to be unshuttered. Outside in the moonlight the dry icy wind was blowing a hurricane. That moon had been with them from its crescent stage until now at its waning. It would not quit the sky until it was blanked out.

Dawson citizens had grown used to these extraordinary phenomena of Nature, the moon that circled round and round the snow-clad earth, through that long night, and the one stretched-out day of sunlight. They became used to the deadly bite of the winter air, and almost used to the ferocious bitings of the tiger mosquitoes in summer.

Bill Sykes was a good-looking and dashing fellow, after the stage villain and Buffalo Bill type, with long tresses and massive moustache. His eyes were small and black, his jaws firm and square, his figure tall, gaunt, but strong as if wrought from steel. In costume also he was the most picturesque figure in the room Indeed, one glance was enough to mark him out as cowboy from top to heel, by anyone who had seen the ideal cowboy on exhibition.

Madge had seen Buffalo Bill and his merry men in their gallant show, she had also read a great deal about

the aristocratic parentage and heroism of the cowboy, and at once jumped to the conclusion that she had a disguised nobleman at her counter ; a nobleman under a cloud, of course, for he would not be a cowboy unless he had been forced to abandon his title and estate ; yet, despite all his early faults, one who had won the highest honours at Oxford and was quite able to correct any American professor of Greek or Latin, as all cowboys are described in romances to be.

Filled with girlish admiration for this romantic and noble order of beings, she resolved to question this present specimen directly and bravely.

The chance came. He was regarding her with admiring looks when she suddenly started upon him, with a seductive smile.

"You're a cowboy, I know, sir."

"I was. But how can you tell, missy ?"

"By instinct. I knew you were one the moment I set eyes on you."

"Wall, that is a fine instinct," he said, fixing his small but bold black eyes full on her. "And what else can you tell about me ?"

"That you are of blood royal—perhaps a prince. Eh ?"

"Not exactly ; no, not nearly so high up in the peerage, miss."

"A duke, then, or the heir-presumptive to a duke ?"

"Not quite that either," he replied, twirling his moustache.

"An earl, at *least ?*"

"I might have been, had my father been one, but unfortunately he wasn't."

"Then you are a lord, *surely ?*"

"Wall, no, I ain't."

"Oh, say that you are a baronet or an honourable," cried the maiden in great distress.

"I shall if it will ease your mind any, miss, but I doubt if it would be quite Gospel truth."

"But you can talk Greek and Latin and all the other dead languages better than any professor? All cowboys can do that, surely?"

"Wall, I don't know that I ever did hear any cowboy do it. Yet we are all pretty fair at language sometimes, particularly when we are raged."

She laughed at this reply, for she thought he was only teasing her, all the better to keep up his *incognito*.

"You are very cute, but I know two things about you that you cannot deny."

"Yes?"

"That you come from England; and did something before you left home. Also that 'Jerk' isn't your real name. There, now; what can you say to that?"

"Yes, you are on the correct track at last, missy; I am originally from England, and I *did something* afore I left. Likewise, 'Jerk' isn't my baptismal or family name. Does that please you?"

"Oh, yes. Now, do tell me your real name, and I'll soon spot your title, for I've got an old 'Burke's Peerage' in my box, and I make a study of the nobility of England."

He regarded her with a puzzled expression for a moment, then he answered gravely:

"Wall, missy, my real *bonâ-fide* name is Sykes. Bill, or William, Sykes. Sykes with the 'y' to it."

Madge regarded him angrily. Would he never stop chaffing her?

At this moment Corporal Drum, of the mounted police, who had been standing close by listening to this conversation, chipped in and asked:

"Sykes, with the 'y.' Ah; may I ask if you're one of the Blankshire Sykes's? I knew one of that lot once."

Corporal Drum also had a weakness, like Madge, for the aristocracy of the home country. He was fond of tracing his own forefathers back to the Drums of Bumbledown. He had seen the Queen, and once visited a West End club; since then he had kept himself posted up on the old families.

The ex-cowboy regarded his questioner luridly, while he played with his knife. He did not understand the drift of these queries. He began to suspect a trap, and was growing dangerous in consequence. Yet he replied sedately enough, all the while grasping his knife. "No, I ain't one of the Blankshire Sykes with the blank—blank 'y.' My family came from Wapping way, London, East. Any more questions, pard?"

CHAPTER VIII.

BILL SYKES GOES ON THE TRAIL.

It was an awkward and momentous crisis for the company to face, the pause that ensued after Jerk put that polite query to Corporal Drum.

When men become soft-voiced and gently polite on Western ranches or Canadian diggings it is wisdom to keep a sharp eye on their hands. Not many present but knew; even Madge understood what kind of music was most likely about to begin, when Bill Sykes swung round so as to face this peerage-adoring policeman, and put both his hands negligently behind his back. The humorous smile that curled his thin lips deceived no one. Those mirthful sparkles that suddenly lit up, and seemed to make those Indian-like eyes grow larger and more devilish than before, might well have given the bravest of men serious thought.

Bill was measuring his male questioner and trying to hold in his untamed passions, for he still remembered that he was on Canadian soil. On Texan ground he would not have waited one-quarter the time for the reply.

"Any more questions about my family, pard?" he repeated with a more ingratiating and oily sweetness than before. "I'll be most happy to oblige you, or

any other boss present who may wish to play his little jest on this cove."

Corporal Drum looked grieved that his friendly inquiry should be met in this spirit. He was a brave fellow who had faced death too often to know what fear was, and in spite of that little weakness of his, was greatly respected amongst his comrades and the camp in general.

He knew that no one present would dare to accuse him of cowardice, whatever he did now. He had no desire to offend or quarrel with this interesting stranger. Therefore, he quietly placed both his hands on the bar counter, where they could be seen by Bill to be empty, and was just about to begin an elaborate explanation, which would have made matters ten times worse, when Madge came to the rescue.

"Don't be so touchy, boys. It was all my blame beginning such a foolish conversation."

Bill gallantly turned to her and swept his fur cap off his head.

"Don't mention it, my dear. A gal has privilege to ask what she blamed well wants from a man. But"—he turned once more to the corporal—"when a man, as I take you to be, pard, gets too curious, I like to satisfy him, if I can."

"Look here, you blethering dunderskull!" shouted one of Drum's comrades, pushing the corporal on one side, and taking his place. "What the mischief do you mean trotting out your old country dead-heads before a stranger, and disgracing your mates in this fashion? Excuse the corporal, chummy. He's one of the best we have for work, but he's a bit soft—like

Madge, there, over an aristocrat. He did not mean any harm."

"Ah; thought I was a bloated aristocrat, did he?" said Bill with a grin, recovering his good humour. "Wall, I ain't; nor am I vexed now that I know he wasn't trying to play possum. We do that to 'tenderfeet' down Texas way, but I guess I've vaccinated long ago."

Concord was once more restored, glasses were replenished, and the hours slipped past pleasantly.

The next few days, if they could be called days, where so much darkness reigned, Bill Sykes did a profitable business, and at the end found himself richer than even he had calculated upon being when he first came in. He had supplied the city with what it lacked. He had also earned the gratitude of the citizens by bringing the first letters which they had received for the past six months; and although the postage had been more than ten times their weight in gold, still the news-famished diggers considered them dirt cheap at the price.

Bill did not charge for delivering those precious epistles; the receivers, however, insisted on planking down their nuggets in exchange, and William permitted them to have their way. Through this gratuitous postal traffic he cleared enough to make him consider seriously upon becoming overland postman.

A number of the letters, however, were still on his hands unclaimed. Some of the owners were absent on their distant claims, other owners lay under the snows, beyond all need for further earthly tidings. That is, their starved and frozen bodies lay under the heavy

snow heaps, while their spirits may have known all that they cared to know about the writers.

"Do you know anything about a party called Eastlake—Lewis Eastlake?" Bill asked the inspector of the district. "For I have several letters for him, and also messages from his friends."

"Yes," replied the inspector. "He came here last summer to examine several claims, that had been sold in London. These didn't seem to be much good, however, at this time, and looked panned-out; in fact, they looked pretty well cleared by the original owners before they vended them. But since then they have struck a deeper and a richer level, with splendid results. This Eastlake was greatly disappointed with what he saw, and went off with another man, by name Jack Wade, in the Fort Norman direction to prospect, and as yet have given no report of themselves."

"Ah, I want to find Lewis Eastlake, for he has been recommended to me very highly, so I guess I'll take a turn up the same trail with some stores and seek for him. What sort is he?"

"As fine a fellow as ever came to the Yukon. He don't know much about digging, or he wouldn't have left this quarter so quickly; but his partner does, therefore I hope if they survive the cold to hear something good about them."

Dawson City was not a beautiful town, composed as it was of rough slab huts. In the summer time it appeared at its worst, for then there were no snow and icicles to adorn the roof angles.

The huts were bare, inside and out, being put up in haste and for shelter only. The time had not yet arrived for either men or women to dream about

settling down in Dawson City. They were only stopping long enough to make their pile, so that any cover served which would keep them warm. The utmost that was done in the matter of decoration was to stick up cuttings from the illustrated papers, or photographs of absent friends.

Yet some of the unlucky ones might just have thought about settling down. Some had been long enough in this locality to be confirmed Klondikers. They had got so used to the fierce winter and the relentless mosquitoes that they could not have been happy anywhere else! a more temperate climate now would make them uncomfortable, while something would seem wanting if the buzz of the blood-suckers no longer sounded in their ears. When they had made up their minds long ago that the utmost which they could expect from Dame Fortune were grub stakes, and they had abandoned all idea of ever leaving the Yukon. When a digger has been ten or twenty years on the job without making his pile he generally accepts his destiny; the big prizes are not for his kind, and he becomes satisfied if he can make enough to carry him along year in and year out.

There are, of course, many of this kind about every goldfield. They are thoroughly experienced miners, and know all about the practical part of their work, but they just manage to miss fortune, in spite of their skill, and through no fault of theirs. The hole they fix on may be only a few inches from the rich one, or they come too late or leave off too soon. It is their luck, they say, and no man can alter that.

In the winter time Dawson City is certainly more picturesque than in the warm weather. With three or

four feet of snow covering all blemishes and resting on the roofs, it looks as if swaddled in well-bleached blankets. It is a dependable winter here; there is no uncomfortable thawing of that dry and powdery snow, so that it is not difficult to get about with snow-shoes or sledges. The rivers are, perhaps, the roughest and most rugged of the tracks, with the ice which has been forced upwards in hummocks. Overhead the star-filled sky bends, seldom completely dark, since the Aurora Borealis plays pretty constantly when the moon is not shining. A grim kind of chilly dawning also marks off the twenty-four hours for a short interval.

The population of Dawson City numbered at this time between six and seven thousand souls. Circle City had emptied its two thousand inhabitants into the more popular town, and all the likely ground for miles round had been taken up. Newcomers were compelled either to work for wages or else go out prospecting in wide districts.

The Yukon, however, was big enough to accommodate many times the number of adventurers that were already here, and as Circle City had been well stocked at the beginning of winter, starvation cases had been very few, and now that Bill Sykes had brought in a fresh supply they were not likely to suffer great privation before the next season opened.

Those who had spent all their gold-dust were trusted, as they pledged themselves to work off their debts. Those who possessed claims believed too much in them to part for any present offer.

Bill Sykes had come, like most of the others, believing that there was gold to be got here yet,

hardly swallowing all the tall rumours that had been floating about the States.

But when he beheld the actual condition of things —the jam-pots, jars and bags of gold-dust and nuggets—they made him wild to think he had stayed away so long.

There it was *en evidence* everywhere. In the dancing and drinking saloons he saw men and women pitching the stuff about with a reckless prodigality that put Texas and California completely into the shade. On Sundays the respectable lot went to the sheds which served as churches and gladdened the hearts of the clergy by filling the plates with the precious ore. Men gambled away handfuls at a game and permitted the girls they danced with to help themselves from their laden pockets.

There was no closing-time here in the stores, restaurants, or hotels, and as yet no special licence required to sell liquors. Yet law and order were enforced and fewer outrages perpetrated than might have been expected under the circumstances.

The reason for this, doubtless, was that, isolated as they were from the outer world, and forced into constant intercourse, each citizen knew all about his neighbours—what money they had and what prospects, with all the other secrets that are generally kept hidden in civilisation.

All nationalities were represented, and with the exception of an occasional dispute, the women and men were like one family.

Bill took a good look round the camp, and after seeing some of the pan-washings on Bonanza Creek and Eldorado, he no longer had a single doubt left.

The Yukon Valley held gold enough to swamp the world when it was properly exploited.

He did a considerable flutter at the cards during his stay, and, as he was no novice at the games, he added materially to his store of nuggets. He tried also to get a share on some of the less-tested claims, offering all he was worth, but without success. He was told to go out and find a claim for himself.

"There are hundreds of creeks lying waiting for inspection, as good and, perhaps, better than the Bonanza ; go out and prospect for yourself."

He was now firmly convinced that this was so, therefore, after inquiring carefully and studying the official maps, he packed up three of his sledges, and, laying in a plentiful supply of ammunition, he set off towards the direction in which he had been told Lewis Eastlake and Jack Wade had disappeared.

He was not aware of the title of the man he was after. At Vancouver he had fallen in with an agent who had given him the letters and messages he was now carrying. The terms which this agent had offered him to undertake the task had been sufficiently handsome to interest him in the missing man.

Someone, to whom money was no object, had the preservation and welfare of this adventurer at heart. At Wrangel Bill had been received by another agent from the same source. "The Klondike Moose Mining Company" both of these agents represented, yet it seemed as if the man, who was their representative on the field, was of more importance in their eyes than the claims. Had he been an absconding director who had walked off with all the public funds he could not have been more tenderly sought after.

Bill Sykes had been promised sufficient guerdon with an advance given to prove the *bonâ-fides* of the transaction, to make him ready to travel to the North Pole in pursuit of his quest. He had proved himself plucky enough to make him regardless of perils by the way, and not being troubled with a spark of principle or remorse, had it been to accomplish the death of this stranger, he would have taken the job in hand quite as willingly. Bill was of the species Bravo, which are not yet quite extinct in civilised circles, but flourish like prickly pears in Texas. It would have been easier and more congenial to his nature to have killed his man, yet he did not object to become his protector instead.

He preferred playing a lone hand in this game, therefore, although several claimless miners offered to accompany him on this expedition, he declined their aid. He took the Indians he needed to manage the sledges and the dogs, leaving the others to drink and gamble their pay in the city. Then, one dim morning, he started off on the trail indicated to him by his friends the police.

CHAPTER IX.

HOPE EASTLAKE BEGINS HER TROUBLES.

TWELVE months had passed since Hope Eastlake had parted with her husband, and now she was in London, with an infant to look after and not a friend to help her.

Twelve months since they parted, after that sweet honeymoon at Falaise, the only memory now for her aching heart to live upon. Twelve months since his lips last touched hers, and eleven months since the last of his letters had been received.

He had written from New York, Vancouver and Dyea; affectionate and cheerful letters. Then had come that long and awful blank. He was going over the Chilkoot Pass; and it seemed as if that cruel Pass had swallowed him up, leaving no trace to point to his fate. He had gone out of her life with a gay farewell, leaving her a bitter legacy of sorrow, anxiety and trouble.

While they were together all seemed to point to happiness, peace and prosperity. The Duchess Valerie was their friend undoubtedly, for had she not placed the Château of Falaise, with all its comforts, at their free disposal? What a dream of bliss those few bright months had been, when she had Lewis all to herself. Only one cloud then lay upon the horizon of

that paradise—the thought of her adored husband's departure. But even that seemed to be a small cloud with the prospects before them. "The Klondike Moose Mining Company," of which he was a director, was a large and flourishing concern. He had been sent out, with a free hand, to investigate the claims already purchased and negotiate for others. His individual shares in all future purchases were to be a quarter profit, and on all that he discovered himself half.

Mr. Stephen Belwood had come over and advanced the money required on the security of her good brother's name. It was a six months' bill, but the money-lender had promised to renew it, as required, to suit the convenience of the borrower and his backer.

Her brother signed the bill willingly enough, for, after her, he loved no one so much in the world as her husband. Sir Lewis made over his life policy, after paying out of the loan the premium for the next year; a heavy one it was, under the circumstances, before the company would take the risk. But that had been settled at last, and the amount insured more than trebled what had been borrowed. Her brother also had money invested in what was considered a safe thing, so that there did not seem any great danger in obliging his friend and brother at this momentous crisis of their lives.

Until the departure of her husband only that little cloud of sorrow of parting lay in their love-sky. But he had not been gone a week before other clouds began to surge up.

First it was the fatal duel, which the friends of the

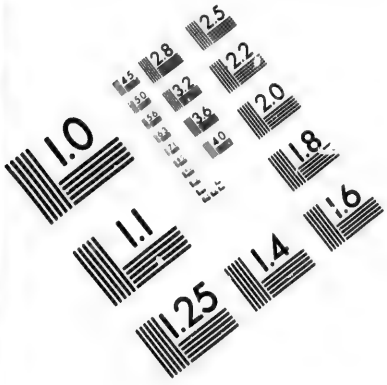
dead young man raked up. Ugly rumours were spread about, that it had been unfairly fought, and, what was more serious to her brother's reputation, that he had either wilfully or ignorantly mismanaged the wounded patient.

He tried to refute those vague charges by appealing to the French surgeon who had attended with him the death-bed of the unfortunate Charles Bingham ; but although this rival did not openly accuse him, he did worse, for he did not defend him. Another case ended fatally, and again the evil report went about that he had mismanaged it ; and after this his brother-practitioners refused to meet him in consultation. By great care and at considerable expense he had built up a good practice for himself at Cherbourg, and in less than a month he found himself with hardly a patient. The wealthy had employed him before now ; only a few of the poor and feeless patients were left so fragile is the reputation of a professional man.

Dr. Waldred was by no means a strong man. Although he kept the matter a secret, he had suffered from heart disease for some years, and these troubles preyed upon his sensitive mind terribly. He tried to be calm for the sake of his sister, but he never went out now without a restorative.

At this time one of his poor patients died of malignant puerperal fever, and that ended his career as a doctor at Cherbourg. He dared not attend another case, for only a complete change of scene would remove the danger of infection from him.

He, therefore, sold his practice at about fifty times less then he had paid for it, and prepared to leave Cherbourg. Then the last blow fell upon him, which



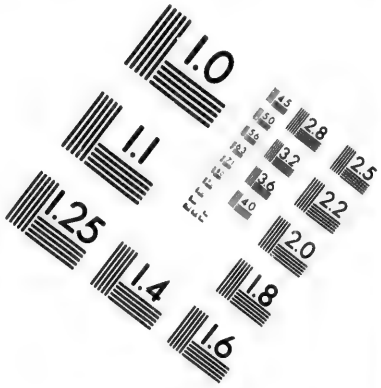
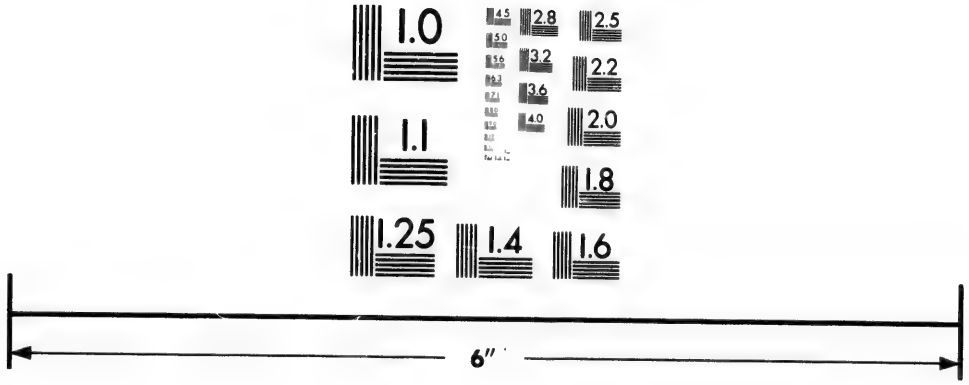
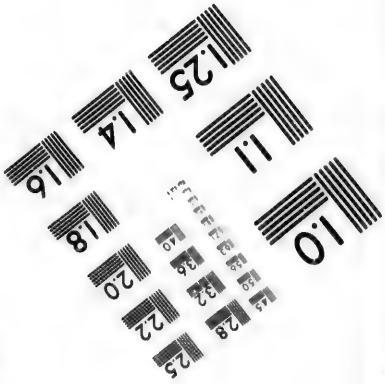


IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (MT-3)





Photographic Sciences Corporation

23 WEST MAIN STREET
WEBSTER, N.Y. 14580
(716) 872-4503

2.8
3.2
3.6
2.5
2.2
2.0
1.8
1.0

killed him as swiftly as a stroke of lightning could have done. He had written to withdraw his money from where it was invested, and while waiting on a reply the crushing tidings came that one of the principals had absconded and left the affairs in a state of utter bankruptcy.

He was ruined now, for that bill was almost due. He rose from the breakfast-table after reading the awful news, to go to his study. But he never reached the door, for half way across the room he suddenly reeled and sank upon the carpet. Hope Eastlake had lost her brother and only protector.

An evil destiny seemed to be hunting the poor young wife relentlessly. She had borne the separation from her husband bravely, and striven her hardest to comfort her brother under these strokes of adversity.

Now, in this sudden and unexpected bereavement, Fate seemed to have emptied all its darts upon her. Ah, if she could have read the future, how little all this would have seemed for a human heart to endure! She had made no friends in France, at least no real friends. We are all one family as the descendants of the first pair, yet whereas Englishmen may pity and succour the refugee foreigner, Frenchmen and Germans, when they shew pity at all to the penniless outcast, have only pity and sympathy for their own countrymen. The foreigner is promptly kicked out of these lands as soon as misfortune comes upon him and he has spent his money. They have no space nor charity for outside paupers. That is the duty of "perfidious" Albion, the contemptible weakness of broad-backed, soft-hearted, wooden-headed Johnny Bull.

Her dead brother had been a rival of Monsieur

Crapaud on his native soil, which made the offence greater to those democrats. They don't think it at all unfair to provide John Bull with doctors, dentists hairdressers, costumiers, authors, and painters, because he is simple enough to admire foreign produce and prefer it to his own. But they are not so soft. They will not tolerate anything literary, artistic nor scientific outside their own compatriots. They are patriotic and national.

What was this afflicted lady to do? Where turn for help or consolation? The people who had invited her to their "At Homes" while her brother was prosperous had turned their backs upon her at the first waft of the adverse gales.

There was little time left Hope to lament over the brother she had lost. We may sit down and mourn over our dead when kind friends are round us to take the sordid details out of our sight and hearing. No kind friends were near to Hope Eastlake, therefore she had to brace up and face the trouble by herself.

Had she any friends in England, since she had none in Cherbourg? No, she could not recollect any, only her absent husband, and his mother, who had died five years before. Her brother had led a retired life in England, and their parents had died while she was still a child; as for other relations, she did not know anything about them.

She was absolutely alone in the world, as far as she knew. Alone, and expecting to be a mother in a few months.

Two nights she sat by the bier of her dead brother, looking at his intellectual and death-beautified face, and thinking out the problem of life and death. As

Hamlet thought it out, as so many countless martyrs to life have thought it out, like Hamlet, to rise wearied but hopeless of the issue.

"To be, or not to be?" When men sit down to reason this gloomy philosophy out to its bitter end it all depends upon their madness how the logic terminates. When women in the *condition* of Hope Eastlake sit down to reason out this question, there can only be one decision, and that is the decision of the most implacable laws.

"I must wait, bear all things, suffer all things, for this precious gift of God, which *must be* ushered into earth." No *wife*, who believed in her husband, ever was a traitress to her sacred charge, since the human family commenced.

Hope rose from her self-communings and with fervent prayers to Heaven braced herself up for her coming duty and her holy gift. She had money enough to bury her brother and pay for the attentions of those hirelings who came about her at this time; then with the lawyer she went through his papers. Dr. Waldred had insured his life for four thousand pounds, and left this, with his other personal effects, to her. These personal effects when they were sold brought in fifty pounds. He had a little over three hundred pounds in the bank at the time of his decease.

But the bill which the money-lender held over her absent husband and her dead brother was for five thousand pounds. On the morning after the funeral, Mr. Stephen Belwood appeared before her, and presenting it, asked for a settlement. It was not due for another fortnight, but she did not know about these legalities.

Mr. Stephen Belwood was rather a melancholy, white-faced man of about thirty-five. He was well dressed, with the orthodox moustache and a gentlemanly-looking fellow, so long as he did not open his mouth. When he did, he exhibited decided traces of a defective education. Yet he was deferential all through the interview.

He put it before her that he was not the principal in the money-lending business, but only a manager looking after other people's money. He had exceeded privileges in doing the business at all, out of friendship and kindness to her absent husband. Now, if she left him in the lurch, he would be a ruined man.

This appeal of Mr. Stephen Belwood touched Hope as he expected it would. She had to own that he had been affable and kind on his last visit to Falaise, whilst the borrowing was being negotiated, also that he was only asking his rights now, and asking them in a very humble and deprecating way. She was alone and friendless in a foreign land, and this man was a countryman—he was so far as his own birth was concerned, but he belonged to the tribe of Israel, who are aliens in every country, for all that.

She gave him her confidence, and he was most sympathetic. She promised to give him the four thousand pounds from the insurance and the three hundred pounds from the bank.

But when he heard that she would have only fifty pounds left he became chivalrous. He said that he would be satisfied *meanwhile* with four thousand two hundred and fifty, leaving her a clear hundred to begin the world with.

"Hit will take you to London, Lady Eastlake," he

said respectfully, "hand hif you will permit me to be your hescort I shall get you comfortable lodgings with ha friend of mine while you look about."

He dropped his h's and picked them up at the most unexpected places, but he was a polite and respectful man, and as she looked at his serious face and filmy dark eyes she had no fear of him. He was a delicate-looking man, narrow-chested, red-lipped, and with a nervous cough.

"I have had some experience in nursing, and I'd like to be a nurse," she said, after they had finished their business conversation.

"Yes. I think Hi can be hof use to you 'ere also, if you will make me your agent in London. I 'ave a good number of clients who will be 'appy to hoblige me in this matter."

Poor Hope—Lady Eastlake—was grateful for his kindly aid. He stayed in Cherbourg until she had settled all her business, then he escorted her in the most chivalrous manner across the Channel and provided her with modest lodgings in London, out in the Brixton direction.

CHAPTER X.

HOPE EASTLAKE AT BRIXTON.

HOPE EASTLAKE departed from Cherbourg without saying good-bye to those fair-weather friends, and left behind her in consequence a goodly number of active evil-wishers. She went quite openly away with the money-lender, and permitted him to attend upon her *en route*, feeling grateful to him for his attentions. She did not dream that misconstruction could be put upon this action of hers, for Mr. Stephen Belwood never, by the slightest look or word, offended her susceptibility.

He wasn't exactly the man she would have chosen for a friend at any time, had she been given any choice in the matter. He was by no means an entertaining companion, as there was only one subject he could speak at all upon, and this subject wasn't one that interested her at all—money and the quickest methods of making it.

True, she wanted to make enough to keep her respectably, but that modest ambition was not, in Mr. Stephen Belwood's mind, worth consideration.

Literature, with the exception of the Exchange and Stock Market literature, was totally a *terra incognita* to Mr. Stephen Belwood. He had never read a verse of poetry in his life. As for art—well, at times he

dealt with *old masters* to his groaning clients, but he never spoke about these masterpieces outside business hours, and as he knew nothing about either art or artists, he could not be drawn in these directions. Science was not at all in his line, except the science of assaying. He knew that branch pretty well as far as the testing of gold and silver was concerned.

He knew, however, the state of the City pulse to a beat, and was an expert at rises and falls of stock, but as this knowledge did not appear to interest Hope he discreetly held his tongue. This was a virtue which Mr. Stephen Belwood had, if he had few others. He seldom gave strangers the opportunity of hearing how badly his father had treated him in the matter of education. His words were golden, and he didn't pitch about his gold recklessly.

In manner he was mild, sedate, and self-depreciating —a shy, retiring and modest man, easily domesticated, one would have said who did not know his profession or himself. His eyes were filmy and dark, his nose not too pronounced, although slightly Semitic in shape. Those dim eyes, with the chalky complexion, sunken cheeks, and vivid scarlet lips, gave him the delicate and wearied appearance of a man far advanced in consumption, which the short painful cough seemed to confirm. He did not put on any airs of gallantry or protection towards his fellow-passenger on the passage. He bought her ticket for her, and calmly accepted the money from her when he gave it to her. He found a good seat for her on the sheltered side of the boat, gathered her mantle about her, and acted only as any well-behaved man would act under the circumstances.

He did not intrude upon her in any way, although he kept near enough to attend to her wants. To Hope, who had not yet seen any other specimen of his tribe, Stephen Belwood could not possibly have treated her more kindly and delicately. Womanlike, she began to invest him with qualities, which, had she expressed them, would have made him grin under his hand and wonder at her imagination. She thought his silence, which really chanced because he had nothing to say, was out of consideration for her recent bereavement, and respected him for that fancied delicacy. His habitually-wearied and sad-looking visage appeared to her caused by his sincere sympathy. She even honoured him for accepting her passage money and allowing her to pay the steward for her refreshments. These were the actions of a man who did not wish a comparative stranger, as she was to him, to feel herself placed under any pecuniary obligation to him. She even went further in her good quality creating, for she began to feel that, although a money-lender and company promoter, he must have a disinterested desire to befriend her as far as he could, out of sympathy for her lonely position and for the sake of her absent husband.

Not being a very deep reader of character, she could not know that this sad-faced, shy man was acting according to instructions in now taking her away from France; that she was being made the unconscious victim of as vile, shameful and cowardly a plot as ever revengeful woman concocted, and loathsome parasite carried out—to bring a stain upon a fair and spotless reputation. She had no means of knowing that her brother had been hounded to death by the same

secret enemy and her agent, and that already in Cherbourg her name had become a byword amongst those she had once known. She would not have believed it at this hour, even if told, that this chalk-faced scoundrel had made and won a bet on her innocence, that amongst those who last left the packet were two *gentlemen* who firmly believed that she had gone as the mistress of this money-lender. She was too ignorant of the world as yet to be able to grasp at these evil things, nor was she aware of the other reasons her modest companion had for keeping her under his watchful eyes, and allowing her no other adviser for the present.

A week or two must yet pass before the insurance company would pay her claim upon them. From the reading of her brother's will, Stephen Belwood was perfectly aware that, legally, he could not claim a penny from her. She had given him already the two hundred and fifty pounds from the bank, and felt grateful, poor innocent, for the fifty which he had allowed her to retain for her own use. It appeared so like a gift that she could not be suspicious of this benefactor.

She had promised to deliver over to him the four thousand when she got it, and he meant to secure that cheque before he relaxed for an instant his kindly care of her.

He was terribly anxious about that four thousand pounds, and this made him preoccupied and melancholy-looking as he hovered so devotedly near her. To prevent her from making any casual acquaintance occupied his Napoleonic mind all the passage over. This drove away both his appetite and the *mal de mer*

from him. There is no surer preventive of sea-sickness than a mind engrossed in other matters. As for spending a shilling of his own money on his companion, such an idea never entered the business-like thoughts of Stephen Bellwood. He only expended money as fishers purchase bait. He had already baited his hook with that fifty pounds, which was considered quite sufficient outlay for his purpose.

Mr. Stephen Belwood, like all true capitalists and money-spinners, looked carefully after the pence. He could spend, without a murmur, large sums on expensive champagne lunches or dinners when he had an object in view, but he gave the meanest of tips to the waiters. He did not grudge either the contributions which his private vices drew from him at times, where his vanity or ruling passions were concerned, but he would dispute his cab fare and beat the bootblack down to the lowest fraction. What he spent was either for ostentation or for the purposes of business. He had never in his life wasted a cent upon charity or on friendship.

But Hope could not know this. Indeed, much more astute judges had been deceived in the character of Stephen Belwood.

The lodgings in London, to which he recommended her and took her as soon as they arrived, were in one of the numerous and closely packed side streets between Camberwell and Brixton; a small house of three floors, with a strip of about two feet of front garden and a back-yard of some half-dozen paces. After the open spaces of Cherbourg Hope felt crushed in by brick walls and overlooked by windows. The

only line of sky was that above the roof, a very circumscribed patch of dingy grey.

The landlady was a Jewess of about twenty-nine, fat, strong-featured, and lavishly powdered; indeed, she appeared to use powder instead of soap and water. She was a very dressy woman, however, who left the duties of looking after her lodgers to her Christian, or rather, un-Christian, drab of a servant.

Her husband was a clerk in one of the establishments of Mr. Stephen Belwood; a little sharp-visaged, hook-nosed Israelite of forty. Hope did not see much of her landlord, as his hours of toil were long and arduous.

Mr. Stephen Belwood had wired on arrival of the packet at Weymouth, and Mrs. Solomon Davis had prepared one of her back rooms upstairs for her lodger. It was a small room, and meanly furnished, but the rent satisfied Hope. Five shillings a week, with the use of the kitchen range. Lights, coal and attendance extra. Hope decided that she would wait upon herself for the present, and thus she started life in London.

"You 'ad better 'ave your letters haddressed to my City office," suggested Mr. Belwood. "It will save you from hany undue curiosity supposing hany letters came with your title on them. Sir Lewis Eastlake will also be easier hin his mind if he knows I am looking hafter your interests."

Hope was pleased to fall in with these arrangements. She had resolved to call herself Mrs. Eastlake until her husband's return. A title was superfluous and ridiculous amidst such surroundings, and as a nurse it would only be a bar to her chances of engagements.

"It is indeed good of you to take this interest in me,

Mr. Belwood," she said gratefully to the cold-blooded reptile. "You will not forget to let me have tidings of my husband when you get them ; also, if you can, get me some work to do ?"

"I shan't forget. You know my haddress. When you want my hadvice, come and see me. When I 'ave hany news or business to talk about, I'll run hover and see you. I 'ope you'll be comfortable here. Mr. Davis has been in my employment for many years, and 'as proved himself trustworthy in hevery respect. Has for Mrs. Davis, the different people whom I 'ave sent to her 'ave halways been satisfied with her treatment ; therefore I 'ope she will suit you. If not, let me know hat once. and I'll find hanother respectable place for you. One thing : she will not interfere with you in any way."

"Oh, I shall do all right if I can get work," answered Hope wearily.

"Have patience, and that will come halso. Things look slow sometimes in London, but they are sure to come to those who can wait. I'll find you a few private customers, I have no doubt. By the way, as we are constantly sending out messages and stock to the Yukon, if you like to forward your letters and packages through my hands, they will cost you nothing."

He spoke with his customary wearied and indifferent tones. No eagerness was discernible in his voice or face, no expectant light in his well-trained filmy eyes, yet on the answer of Hope much depended.

He could not stop her letters on English or Canadian soil. At Wrangel ? Perhaps ; but the process would be costly, and there were decided risks attending. The purchased postal clerk might be removed, or be-

come romantic and honest. If she delivered herself into his hands, it was so much extra expense saved and put into his own pocket.

Hope Eastlake fell into the trap, and delivered herself over to the enemy for the usual mess of pottage. She felt that she must study economy in every way she could, for the sake of her unborn child, and doubtless her letters and packets would go much safer through the hands of this business man than by ordinary postage.

"You are indeed kind to propose this, and I shall accept your generous offer."

"Very well. Give hall you want to forward to your 'usband to my clerk Solomon Davis, and I will see that they go hout by the swiftest route."

The game—the sorry game of the wolf and the lamb—was played successfully, Stephen Belwood rose, with a little dry cough, wiped some moisture from his pallid nose and brow on his cambric handkerchief, and took his departure respectfully. There was little fear about his victim now, with Mr. and Mrs. Davis to look after her. He had them all in his clammy grip.

Hope rested that day and night, and the next morning she went out and laid in a stock of paper, pens and ink.

She wrote to her husband a letter of twenty-four pages, revealing secrets to him which ought to have made him the proudest and happiest man in Yukon, if he had received this epistle of love, faith and duty.

Mr. Stephen Belwood opened and read that letter with curling red lips.

"What a fool that woman is, to be sure!" he said, as he posted it on to the Duchess Valerie.

The Duchess Valerie read it at her hotel in Naples, and spent the next four hours biting her pillow with insane fury ; a dose of chloral at last gave her some surcease. While she slept, her maid came in, picked up the crumpled letter out of the fender, and also read it with much interest ; she (the maid) preserved that epistle amongst her other precious treasures. Such things are useful to maids who wish to retain their situations.

After writing to her husband, Hope wrote next to the Duchess Valerie, her husband's friend. She had no jealousy, for she had utter faith in her husband's loyalty and love. She did not tell the Duchess what she had told her husband, yet it was a pathetic letter, which might have melted any woman. She wanted help. She was willing to go out in any capacity so long as she could live and provide for what was before her. She wrote in good faith, thinking that the Duchess Valerie was her husband's friend.

Three weeks passed, and then a letter from her Grace's man of business, stating that the Duchess Valerie was at present yachting in the East, and that he could not give any destination for her letters.

Hope Eastlake, on the receipt of that letter, made up her mind to face her difficulties by herself.

CHAPTER XI.

HOPE LEAVES THE HOUSE OF MRS. SOLOMON DAVIS.

How wearily the months passed in that stuffy and cramped back room! There were only those uniform bricks and windows to look at from the window of Hope Eastlake, with occasionally a discontented face peering down coldly upon her. She saw the same faces day after day, or possibly now and again a new face after the same cold and colourless pattern. None of the faces ever smiled, as they looked forth from those white-curtained windows. She saw them in the early morning, and at all times of the forenoon, raise their blinds and look out with sullen brows. They were then dishevelled, pasty-visaged and sodden women, and dirty-looking, ghastly men. She had no opportunity of seeing how these faces appeared later on in the day, being located at the back regions. Hope often speculated wonderingly in her mind how these men and women managed to exist. They appeared so much alike in their unkempt condition that she thought they must all belong to one trade or profession; also, that the business did not make them happy or sociable. Hope had yet to learn that the expression which she saw on the morning faces of those Brixtonians was the habitual expression of London people when they are looking out of windows on their neighbours, and across the space of a 'bus or tram.

This universal expression freezes the heart of country-bred strangers when they first come to London. They attempt to smile, look cheerful, and even to break the grim spell of speechlessness that hangs about, but no responsive smile answers theirs. A stony glare rewards their bravery and they are crushed. By-and-bye they grow used to this protective hedge of reserve, and become grim-mouthed and wall-eyed, like their neighbours. Then their city education is complete. They take their place in the ranks of voiceless spectres and smile no more. Once the habit is lost it can no more be recovered than can innocence. When the city spectres stretch their lips it is only to grin in a skin-cracking fashion over some stupidity or folly in those about them. When they try to laugh it is a mirthless and artificial cachinnation. They can grin, chuckle, or cackle, but they cannot smile or laugh in large cities.

Hope Eastlake felt the utter dreariness and isolation of her position very acutely during the first months of her sojourn in Brixton. In the house there were several lodgers ; how many she never found out, as she seldom encountered any of them ; and when she did, beyond an abrupt "Good morning," or "Good evening," none of them invited further intimacy.

The landlady and her husband occupied a double room on the ground floor, and appeared to have a considerable number of visitors of both sexes. These visitors entered and left at all hours of the day and night, gliding in and out in the most discreet and silent manner. There were no children in the house. On the second-floor a young couple occupied the front room, while the other two bedrooms were let to two

ladies. Members of the dramatic profession, Mrs. Davis told Hope they were, which accounted for the gorgeous manner in which they dressed when they went forth in the evenings.

Hope lived in the upper flat, where the servant also slept, in a little box-room, while the front room was reserved for casual lodgers, strangers who seldom stayed longer than a night at a time.

It was a shabby house, both outside and in, and not too cleanly kept. Mr. and Mrs. Solomon Davis might have been lodgers also, for, beyond collecting the rent each Monday, they did not interfere with the other residents. The paint on the doors and skirtings was dingy, dry and worn. The wall-papers also shewed years of wear, and the oilcloths on lobbies and stairs were frayed and a mass of patches. Outside the railing and gate were rusty, while the paint on the windows and front door had been sun-baked almost to powder. Hope always knew her own lodgings without looking at the number, for it was one of the most neglected in the street.

She made no acquaintances during these months. The shopkeepers who served her treated her with the cold contempt that her small orders seemed to deserve in their estimation. She went to church regularly morning and evening, but no one took any notice of her, and when the curate learnt where she lived he looked very coldly upon her afterwards, nor did he call upon her.

Acting upon the advice of her supposed friend—Mr. Stephen Belwood — she trusted and waited on him finding her employment; yet while she waited she invested a portion of her money in a typewriter and

occupied herself by learning to use it. He seemed delighted when she shewed him the machine, and informed her that it was a good investment.

Mr. Stephen Belwood called upon her pretty frequently during the first few weeks of her sojourn in Brixton. He cheered her up by saying she must not be anxious at no news coming yet from America, the distance being so great and postal arrangements not being in force yet in those regions. This comforted her greatly for a time.

After, however, the money-lender had secured that cheque his visits became rarer, until they finally ceased.

Yet he did not neglect her altogether, for he wrote several times, and sent one of his confidential clerks to see how she was getting along.

Hope felt grateful for these attentions, even if she did not like the messenger. He was a different man from his master, handsomer a good deal, but much too bold and familiar to please Hope. This young man lived in Clapham, and it seemed her fate to meet him often in the streets when she was out walking.

On these occasions he presumed to accost her and walk with her, much to her annoyance. Yet she was too gentle and shy by nature to treat him as he deserved, nor did he give her any definite excuse for cutting him.

Hope held up bravely until the summer was far advanced, thinking each week would bring her a letter from her husband. She had mastered the mysteries of the type machine and inserted advertisements for work in the papers, but as yet no commissions had come in.

She dared not give way to despair with that trial

before her. The self-confident clerk told her not to be in any hurry, that things would be all right. People were mostly out of town during the summer, but when they returned she would be sure to get employment.

Once, and once only, Walter Gordon, the confidential clerk, was received by Hope Eastlake with hearty welcome. He brought her a half-sheet which had been enclosed to the money-lender.

There were characteristics about this letter which would have raised instant suspicions in the mind of an expert as to its genuineness. Hope was not an expert, however, and never doubted.

It was written with a pencil on a leaf torn from his pocket-book, and conveyed a very brief message that the writer was well, but he had lost his stock of paper and envelopes, and could get none in Dawson City.

"The business communication that came to the governor did not amount to any more than to tell us that our claims were all right," said the clerk. "They were wrapped in newspaper, with the address, as you see, at the foot of each. Our agent at Wrangel forwarded them on in one envelope."

Hope was satisfied, and lived on that forged scrap for months afterwards; indeed it kept her alive until her baby was born.

In the month of October her infant son came to give her a new interest in life. It seemed also to have brought with it the promise of good luck.

The doctor who attended her was a sympathetic as well as a sensible and clever man. Before she was better he had gleaned from her what her circumstances were, also as much of her story as she cared to tell to any stranger.

He proved himself to be a good man, by advising her to quit her present lodgings as soon as she was able to move. He did not tell her why she should do this, or, rather, he told her that it was a badly-drained street, and promised to look out a more healthy locality for her. He did more than this, for without promising her anything he resolved to give her a trial as a nurse as soon as she was able and he had the opportunity of finding her a good patient.

The woman she had to wait upon her during her illness was a creature recommended by Mrs. Solomon Davis—a veritable hag of the Sarah Gamp order, who, in two weeks, wasted what might have kept her for months. So completely did this beldame demoralise the order and economy of her life and pollute the apartment, that she left Hope with but one desire, which was to clear out as rapidly as she could.

Mrs. Solomon Davis displayed the ugly side to her character when she heard that her lodger intended to leave. She made a vulgar outcry about the extra trouble she had been put to with the doctor and nurse being in the house, and, to the horror of Hope, she made use of some very objectionable language.

Next morning, however, after a talk with Mr. Solomon, she altered her hostile attitude and apologised for her rudeness the night before.

"You see, my dear, it appeared like a reflection on my good name, you going off like this, so soon after baby was born. I hope *no one* has been trying to prejudice you against me, or say that we ain't respectable here?"

Hope eagerly assured her that it was only on the

score of health she was going, that the doctor had advised more open space.

"Ah, yes. I guessed it was that doctor, but don't you believe him. This is as healthy a house as any in or about Brixton, and a deal more respectable than many."

Mrs. Davis made a great point about her respectability, which, by the way, Hope had never thought of doubting. Seeing, however, that Hope was firm on the point of moving, she yielded with a fairly good grace.

"You won't forsake us altogether, will you?" she said, with a hypocritical, fawning air. "You'll bring down the sweet baby-boy, and have a cup of tea with us of a Sunday now and then, won't you now, my dear? Promise me you will, now, and I'll try to bear the sorrow of parting with you. You've been here so long now that I have grown as fond of you as if you was a sister."

Hope, in her eager desire to part friendly, gave the desired promise, and also, so that letters might be forwarded, her new address.

The good doctor was as prompt with his assistance as Mr. Stephen Belwood had been dilatory and insincere. He found for her a tidy apartment, to suit her means, in one of the old-fashioned streets of quaint Clapham, not yet demolished by the building fiend. Its days were numbered, however, as the lease had only a year or so to expire.

Mrs. Hambly was a hard-working, honest widow, who carried on the business of a laundry in this ancient cottage. She had been brought to it a bride by her husband, who had been born and died in it,

Her pleasures and her sorrows had all been found within that porch-protected, vine-covered front door Her children had been courted here and gone out to take the responsibilities of life on their shoulders, with fond recollections of the "old house." When the County Council would remove it, as they were bound to do—for undoubtedly it was greatly in the way of modern advance—they would inflict a sorrow on the Widow Hambly next to the sorrow she had felt when her husband had been removed.

There was a long garden to the back, which contributed not a little to the support of Mrs. Hambly. Here she cultivated almost as many vegetables as she required. Her fowls also added to her income considerably.

The doctor knew this humble cottage would please his patient better than a more ambitious modern apartment. The room the Widow Hambly assigned to Hope faced the south-west, and with the old vine clambering over the sides of the window appeared almost rural. The furniture was aged like the vine, and only one of the chairs was absolutely trustworthy; but it felt like a home. Mrs. Hambly was old-fashioned and motherly, not a harpy looking out for victims.

Dr. Aimhurst was a big, burly man, homely in his ways, up to date in his profession, and possessing a heart of gold. The poor worshipped him and the wealthy patients trusted him utterly. He debated in his mind whether he should give Hope a hint as to the character of the house she had quitted, in time, he trusted, for her fair fame. It was a delicate subject to speak about to a poor and ignorant lady. To tell her that she had been living under the roof of a person as

notorious as Mrs. Solomon Davis proved a task too great for his moral courage. A doctor is like a priest in some respects. There are secrets which he must not reveal.

He contented himself, therefore, with telling her that the street she had left was a most unwholesome one, and that she ought not, for the sake of her health, to go near it again. He told her also not to mention where she had been living last to her new landlady or anyone.

Hope, all unsuspiciously, promised to act according to his advice. She did not like concealments of any kind, but she felt that her kind friend Dr. Aimhurst must have the best of reasons for asking her to keep this a secret.

CHAPTER XII.

BILL SYKES BRINGS BAD NEWS.

No man could call in question the reckless courage of that bold buccaneer of the Sierras, Bill Sykes, *alias* Knify Jerk.

He set out on his adventures in the most rigorous of weather. It was below zero to its most extreme depression. Even the Polar bears must have found it uncomfortably appetite-producing and keen.

He had taken his bearings carefully, and all the other precautions which his recent overland experiences must have suggested. His nose was not quite such a classic member as he would have liked, if he had been at the fixing of it. His ears also were better developed than he exactly cared about. But, as Touchstone said about his poor spouse Audrey, they were his very own, and he had no notion of parting with them too suddenly. Therefore, he took good care to guard these members from frostbite.

Besides the Indian sledge-drivers, who had trained their own deer and dogs to the work, he took with him a couple of half-breeds who had traversed the North-West territory from the mouth of the Mackenzie to Hudson's Bay. The Indians were good for their own work, likewise for fishing and hunting ; but these half-breeds, being cleaner in their habits, made more agreeable companions.

234955

At this time of the year, they had a dull kind of daylight for about six and a half hours. The trail which the gold prospectors had taken was almost east from Dawson City—was across country in the direction of the Franklin Lakes. Of course, he could not tell where they might have branched off, yet he trusted to his Indians and half-breeds to find out from some other native rovers.

One point Bill was sure about. This Lewis Eastlake and his partner must have covered a considerable tract of country, or they would have returned to Dawson City for the winter. Jack Wade he had heard described as a man who had spent a considerable time prospecting in the East and North of the territory, on the Peel and Red Rivers and their tributaries.

It wasn't such a wild-goose chase as it may appear to readers who have not been in those regions. Prospectors who were daring enough to venture so far afield were scarce. The tribes of wandering Indians were to be met on the banks of rivers and streams, or in the woods and mountains, following the track of game. They were most likely to know all the whites who had passed through, and the direction they were taking.

The wilds of Canada are extensive, yet although a white man may run a hundred risks of death, from exposure, starvation, blizzards, treacherous rivers, falls down ice crevices, or the deadly hugging of grizzly bears, he can hardly cover his trail from those keen-eyed wanderers.

In Canada, also, the Redskins are the trusting brothers of the British Palefaces. We have kept our treaties faithfully with them. They have the memory

of broken pledges to make them abhor the American United Statesman as much as they respect and like a Canadian, so that they take an active and kindly interest in those who live under the protection of the Union Jack.

The cold was intense, but the temperature was dry and settled. As they flew over the level parts there was none of the depression felt in a humid atmosphere. Every breath they drew through their respirators made the blood course through their veins as if fired with generous light wine.

They had no leisure to feel the cold, for every hour of the daylight was occupied when they crossed the level ground, and there was little enough of that; they had mountains to scale and countless other hardships to face which kept them in a glowing condition.

The dogs were the most difficult to keep, for they had most voracious appetites, and if not quickly supplied would devour anything that was nearest. The reindeer were, however, easily kept, as everywhere their food, the lichen, abounded.

It was apparently a sterile and desolate country over which they went, but to travellers as experienced as these were it was not so in reality. They seldom wanted firewood, for if the trees were dwarfish they were plentiful everywhere; easy to cut down, and not difficult to light. Game also was not scarce after they got a hundred miles away from the mining centre. Ptarmigan and white hares were shot almost daily; now and again a wandering drove of musk ox and wild reindeer were sighted and stalked. Then they had excitement as well as hard work to make them

sleep sound when they all crept under the tent-flap of a night.

Bill Sykes had brought a good supply of stores with him, which, with the exception of some of the dried fruit and preserved vegetables, he seldom had to touch.

He had introduced two novelties to the Klondike miners in the matter of food, which had proved instant favourites — baked pea and lentil flour. Hitherto they had been eating beans and bacon, both good enough in their way to produce warmth and sustain life. But Bill had discovered from a Scotchman how to make a substantial meal in a few moments from a couple of spoonfuls of pea flour. This was in reality the pulse that had nourished the Hebrew children in the palace of the Great King; the sausages that Bismarck fed his legions upon during their winter campaign in France.

A sackful of this flour would provide a man with satisfying food for six months. The longer he used it the better he liked it. It was pre-eminently the food for the Yukon or the Arctic, heat-producing, satisfying, tasty, easily made and easily carried. When Bill Sykes bestowed that boon upon Dawson City it wiped a lot of former delinquencies from his slate.

It was easily made: a handful of the flour put into a pannikin, with a lump of butter or fat, and a little salt. Then some boiling water and a brisk stir-about, and a most succulent paste was the result. A paste to put brains into the thinker, muscles into the worker, and true manhood into the debilitated. With this beneficent mixture on hand scurvy could not possibly find a footing. It cleared the complexion, restored the

coatings which bad whisky had burnt from sorely-tried stomachs, renewed youthful vigour, and spread a wave of unusual hope and happiness over this City of Gold.

Bill had only one regret, and that was, he could not patent it. As a naturalised American he would have liked to have disguised it and sold it in small packets under some other name, but he had given the secret away before the great importance of it dawned upon him.

He had a couple of sacks of this stuff with him now, and, having proved its anti-scorbutic properties, he made up and gave to his men a daily quantity. They all enjoyed the mixture hugely, as they had become used to it before.

"With my gun, a good store of ammunition, and half a dozen sacks of pea and lentil flour, I'm prepared to find the North Pole with any man," Bill had said to the Dawsonians, and after they had tested his special mixture they were prepared to believe him.

Bill and his companions had many adventures as they went along, yet proved that there are no impossible obstacles to prevent a plucky party from crossing the North-West Territory even in the most extreme weather. The Indians did it constantly. Why, then, should not the conquerors and pioneers of civilisation?

Bill Sykes had endured the heat of the gulches of Colorado. His lungs were sound and his digestion perfect. Therefore, he laughed at the fierce ice-breath of the Arctic.

He was a prodigious favourite with the Indians and half-breeds whom he commanded. He was a dead shot with his gun, and absolutely fearless. He was a

firm master, yet by no means tyrannical or unreasonable. What he expected them to do he was equally ready to do himself. In many ways Bill Sykes, murderer and outlaw from Texas, was a born commander.

He tackled grizzlies, brown and black bears on the ledges. Once they encountered a hungry polar white bear, which had prowled down from the Arctic coasts in search of food. They camped with Indians, and were put on the track of those they were searching for. They encountered all the varied fortunes of Argonauts to those climes. Snowstorms came; blizzards broke over them. They dragged their sledges over deadly slopes and passes—clung to Alpine-like ledges—and escaped death in its many aspects as they struggled over that snow and ice-locked region.

At last they came upon the men they were after. It was nearly the close of March before they reached them, and never had relief-party arrived so opportunely.

They found the two men in a hut by the banks of a frozen creek at the foot of one of the passes. They were reduced almost to the last extremity, and had been for the past three weeks existing on starvation rations.

"Another week," said Jack Wade, "and we should have had to wolf our moccasins, while, see here! we have fifty thousand dollars in gold-dust already taken out of our claim."

Jack Wade was the least affected as yet by the hardships which these two prospectors had experienced. He was a strong man, thickset and broad-shouldered; besides, he had been used to a hard life, which his companion had not.

Lewis Eastlake was *hors de combat.* An unvarying diet of salt pork and tinned meat had given him a bad attack of scurvy. He was dropsical, leaden-hued, and almost in the last stages of prostration.

Bill Sykes at once constituted himself doctor and cook. He got out his pease flour and condensed milk and sent his half-breeds and Indians on the hunt for fresh meat. In three days the invalid was able to take an interest in mundane affairs ; then Bill thought of the letters which he had to deliver. Perhaps these would put fresh vigour into the frame of the scurvy-devoured man.

There was a letter from the Secretary of the Klondike Moose Mining Company, with a draft for his expenses and salary as director.

There were three long and tender epistles from the Duchess Valerie. In one of these she told him that his wife had left Cherbourg suddenly, but for where the writer had not been able to discover. In her last letter she informed him that she intended to take a long sea voyage in her yacht, round the Horn and up the Yukon River. She would be at Dawson City about July that year.

No letters from his wife. He had not had one since he left her. What could it mean? He had written to her regularly also—that is, during the past summer, while he was at Dawson City. Bill Sykes saw that the letters he had brought did not have the good effect he expected. There was a French paper that he had not yet delivered. Perchance that might give his patient more heart. He fished it out from his packets and gave it him. Yes, the French paper used the gold-finder up. He opened it, saw a place

marked with blue pencil, and read the poisoned paragraph with glaring eyes.

The French dress their scandal as they dress their dishes—artistically. In this delicately-spiced article Sir Lewis Eastlake learnt his full degradation. His wife had eloped with an Englishman.

This paper said nothing about the death of Dr. Waldred. A former issue had mentioned that disaster.

The young gold-finder crushed the cursed paper in his hand and bent his head upon his breast. He was too weak yet to give way to passion; he could only brood upon his disgrace.

Hope, the companion of his boyhood, his girl sweetheart, to leave him like this!

A certain sense of retributive justice kept him from judging her too harshly. He was feeling, in his bodily weakness, that he had partly deserved this punishment. He had not thought of marrying her until he was a ruined man. Instead of doing so he had wasted his means, like the prodigal, in riotous living. He had only given her and her brother a burden of debt.

"I didn't expect this from Hope," he thought dismally. "Yet I suppose she is like the rest of us. Perhaps I was not as devoted as she expected during those months at Falaise. Perhaps, knowing me as she did, she could not believe I could ever retrieve my evil luck, and so went off with a better man."

"You don't seem to have got cheerful news from your despatches, mate?" observed Bill Sykes, who had been watching him.

"No, I have not; yet it is what I might have ex-

pected," replied the sick man with a forced and bitter laugh.

"A woman sold you, I guess. Yet if one has done so there must be another who longs to repair the injury."

"What do you mean?"

"Only that someone is mighty interested in a young fellow called Lewis Eastlake, and has no scarcity of spondulicks to prove that interest," replied Bill knowingly. "It can't be your mining partners, as they could easily get another man to take your place. I have been commissioned to look after you personally, as if you had been Sir John Franklin himself."

The thoughts of Sir Lewis turned gratefully to the Duchess Valerie. She had not forgotten him if his wife had.

"I can't say who the party is, as my instructions are vague, but I have to deliver you safe and sound in Dawson City this summer, so set to as fast as possible and get well."

Scurvy is a trouble which is cured quickly if taken in time. Bill Sykes had all the condiments with him to effect a rapid cure, and very soon his patient was on his feet and taking his share in the work.

It had been late in the season before Jack Wade and his partner had made this lucky discovery in the extreme end of the Yukon Valley. They had fossicked and sunk many a hole in different parts with indifferent results before they had landed on this. But now it seemed they need go no further; the gold was here and in abundance.

During the next two months they were all hard at

work, shovelling away snow and burning through the ice. They tested only a few panfuls to each hole, and dug these at the specified distance from each claim to satisfy the Government rules. All were rich.

Bill Sykes decided on one claim, and each of his Indians and half-breeds chose theirs. There were a number of names affixed to others that Sir Lewis was empowered to use for his London company, and, these pegged off and taken up, they were ready to go off to Klondike and announce the rich discovery. The "Klondike Moose Mining Company" could now issue their prospectuses with a blare of trumpets.

They had discovered a new and immensely profitable goldfield.

CHAPTER XIII.

STEPHEN BEL OOD RECEIVES THE DUCHESS VALERIE AT HIS CITY OFFICE.

MR. STEPHEN BELWOOD was the proprietor of many branches of the financial profession. He also carried on these different branches under so many varied names, that it was extremely difficult to say whether he had any more right to that of Stephen Belwood than he had to the others.

In his City office and clubs, also about the Stock Exchange he was known as Mr. Stephen Belwood, company promoter and capitalist. He was a well-known figure in the City, and as a City man considerably respected; for he was keen and sure in his forecasts, and whatever he took up were considered to be sound investments.

He was chairman or director of a great number of companies about which there could be very little doubt as to their solidity, and genuine claims to being what they were represented. In fact, it had come to be taken for granted that the name of Stephen Belwood on the board was a sufficient guaranty for the respectability of that company. If stock was mentioned shareholders could depend upon what was printed being there.

He met his calls with unvarying punctuality, therefore he was, according to Stock Exchange morality, a

highly-respectable citizen. He was also generally successful in extracting gold from whatever schemes he took in hand, and able to get out after the profits were extracted, without raising the suspicions of those braying watchdogs, the financial paper critics. People who dabble in shares ought to keep their eyes as closely as possible on the leaders and manipulators of the market. Otherwise they have no right to grumble if they have to pay instead of being paid. It is all a game of speculation and duplicity.

The City offices of this astute man of business were spacious and furnished regardless of expense. Doors, partitions, counters, tables, and other woodwork were of the most massive and solid polished mahogany, all richly carved. The windows were of the finest and strongest plate-glass, while the brasswork, plates, door handles and hinges were ornate, heavy, and kept in the highest state of lustre.

Every modern and commercial appliance was here at hand, while his clerks were all young and active men in the most approved condition of dudism.

It appeared an easy and languid business, this company promoting, to anyone entering the outer office. The young dandies never appeared to be doing any harder work than reading the financial newspapers, picking their teeth, or trimming their nails. As a rule they were much more important and smug than their modest and somewhat wearied-looking chief.

Occasionally, as these languid and fashionably-dressed young gentlemen sat on the morocco-covered, hair-stuffed chairs so gracefully killing, or appearing to kill, time, a visitor of the same order would drop in and shake hands.

Then, after a confidential whisper, they would either frown and nod, or else smile gently and nod. Sometimes one would rise, and putting on his silk hat, go forth with his visitor to a neighbouring restaurant, where other Stock Exchange loungers were assembled. A bottle of champagne of extra quality would be ordered, and its merits discussed with other mysterious news. The contents of a goodly number of glasses of wine or cognac passed within those collars and fancy vests during the day, yet these young speculators did not appear to lose their mental balance or run short of cash at any time. True, they took their turn at the bar by relays, yet the news which they whispered must have required a deal of moisture. They invariably returned to the office, as sleek, smug, and sedate as ever, no matter how often duty called them forth.

Doubtless these young gentlemen were of service to Mr. Stephen Belwood, as he was not the man to keep them for amusement. Older men when they have to drink so much are apt to get livery ; then their consciences begin to prick them, and they find it difficult to *lie* with the misleading fluency of an innocent and fresh young Throgmortonite, who has not yet worn the coating of his stomach.

In the West End Mr. Stephen Belwood had offices, not so sumptuously furnished as his City ones, yet substantially fitted also. There were the offices of " The Concord Discount and Mortgage Company." There was no Stephen Belwood on the brass plate of this establishment, but instead, in one corner, the name of the general manager, Walter Gordon.

He was modest about announcing his connection with this most lucrative business. No one except his

employees knew that he was the entire company. A few unfortunates, like Sir Lewis Eastlake, understood he was connected with this firm in some way. Those who asked for his influence sometimes, and thought him a good fellow when they had their request granted. They considered him merely a shareholder, who sometimes went out of his way to oblige a friend.

Partners he may have had, of course; very few capitalists could have carried on such an extensive money-lending business as this without having to borrow themselves. If so, however, they were even more completely hidden than he was from the general public of borrowers. In this business the clerks did not wear superfine attire, nor consume champagne and time in private bars. They dressed plainly, and from the hour they arrived in the morning till leaving off time at night they seldom lifted their heads from their ledgers.

He had various other businesses, each of which bred money at the rate of twenty-five per cent, which were conducted by different managers and under various names. Over each signboard hung the significant three golden balls, that denote the poor man's bank.

When visiting his West End establishment and his numerous pawnshops, Stephen Belwood dressed in his shabbiest overcoat and wore a slouch hat, which pretty well disguised him, He on these occasions slunk into the apartments of his managers by private ways, and conducted his business with great secrecy. Only his confidential assistants ever saw him on these occasions To the ordinary shop men and clerks he was an unknown personage.

He owned a magnificent house in one of the fashion-

able suburbs, where his wife, a lady of more than ordinary attractions, dispensed his hospitalities on an extravagant scale. These entertainments furnished matter for the halfpenny papers, and kept up his reputation in the City. A company promoter must go in for ostentation and parade if he wishes to succeed.

But although the master of many menials, he never lost his abject and wearied manner. He slunk into his own mansion as he did into his City office, as if he had no real business in either of the places. While his clerks and guests feasted like aldermen, he contented himself with a nibble of biscuit and a glass of water. He seemed to have only one passion, and that was to make money.

On the fourth day of January this remarkable man entered his City office fully an hour before his usual time. As he passed through the outer apartment, he nodded gravely to his subordinates and said apologetically: "Hi ham hexpecting a lady 'ere in a few moments. Do not keep 'er waiting when she comes, but show 'er hin at once."

He went into his own sanctum, the walls of which were covered with maps and sections of maps. Those portions where the properties in which he had an interest were located, were specially coloured. On the table were piles of letters, papers and prospectuses. These he turned over with but little appearance of interest. One of the prospectuses, however, he took up and read through carefully, being a proof which had just come from the printers.

It was a prospectus of the "Klondike Moose Mining Company," which had not yet been issued to the public.

He drew his pencil through the word "Klondike," and put "Yukon" instead. Then he went over to the latest published map of Alaska and the North West Territory and studied it closely.

"Dickens is far too cautious and non-committing in his statements," he murmured reflectively. "We shall never strike fire with a prospectus like this, I must 'ave it hall haltered.—Ah! Good-morning to your grace."

"Morning, Belwood," answered the Duchess Valerie, as she sailed forward, and took a seat, which he offered her with a bow. "I suppose we have perfect privacy here, Belwood? No curtain listeners, or anything of that kind."

"Rest assured habout that, your grace; my ma'ogany is pretty solid."

He stood before her in his usual serious and attentive manner. She did not look at him, but at the map opposite her on the wall, while he fumbled nervously with his unopened letters. What she had come to say did not seem so easy to begin as she had anticipated.

She had come fully provided against the cold, and was clad in heavy sealskins. Outside a keen north wind was blowing, making people shiver and double up as they faced it, but in this office it was almost oppressively warm. At least, she felt as if her sealskins oppressed her. She longed to cast them aside, yet she resisted the temptation.

All at once her dark eyes, roving from the map, fell abruptly on the table. She felt that although he was gazing at her respectfully, yet he was watching her keenly and she resented this from such a base tool. It made her task all the more hateful to have to be familiar and confidential with such a man.

Stephen Belwood waited for her to begin the conversation, and while he did so he read the cause of her embarrassment. She had come to ask him to do some more dirty work. She was not satisfied with the evil that had been wrought. "Surely it cannot be murder that the jealous beauty is meditating upon this time," he thought as he looked at her so respectfully. "I must draw the line at that, for I have no intention of risking the fatal noose even to please such a good customer. I doubt though if anything much short will please my lady."

Suddenly the large heading of the open prospectus caught her glance, and she lifted it up and began to read through it. It would do to break the ice.

"Are you going to issue this prospectus, Belwood?"

"Yes, your Grace, when hit 'as been properly reconstructed."

"I see you are quoting freely from the vendor's reports, but you say nothing about your special commissioner's, Sir Lewis Eastlake's, opinion. I have had letters also from him on these claims, and they were not encouraging."

"Pardon me, your grace. Sir Lewis's examination was a cursory one. 'e listened to houtside opinions, and did not wait long henough to test these claims properly. Now since 'is departure the vendors 'ave discovered fresh pockets, and 'ave washed hout hover sixty thousand pounds' worth of gold, which, with what they 'ad stored up before, makes over one 'undred and fifty thousand pounds washed hout hin less than height months."

"Do you believe this to be true?"

"I 'ave the hutmost reason to believe hit to be true

hin every particular. I also believe that hour next mail from the Yukon will inform us that Sir Lewis Eastlake 'as discovered a valuable property hin the North-East."

"He is safe and alive, you think? It is many months since I heard from him last," asked and said the Duchess eagerly.

"Yes; he left Dawson with one of the most experienced miners on the field. They 'ad a good store of provisions, and I 'ave since forwarded fresh supplies. Oh, yes, 'e will be safe, and I 'ope successful."

"I hope so, and I shall soon know for myself, for I have made up my mind to take a yacht voyage round America and land at Dawson as soon as traffic has once more opened."

Stephen Belwood looked at the Duchess with genuine admiration. He replied: "I wish I could go with you, for I am positive that this will be the best speculation I have ever been in. I have already despatched agents, as you know, to Vancouver, Wrangel and Dyea. My intentions have been to charter a small steam-ship and send her laden with plant by the same route. This you may be sure I would not do if I wasn't sure of my ground."

"I believe you, Belwood, and as we both get the name of being lucky, I am ready to prove my faith by going in with you to the extent of, say, a hundred thousand pounds."

She uttered these words carelessly, as if this sum was a mere bagatelle to her, as indeed it was. Her listener also received it coolly, yet a little colour crept into his white cheeks and a kind of light into his filmy eyes.

"Thanks, your Grace. Hi must now raise the capital

from four to six hundred thousand pounds, hotherwise we shall 'ave the L.P. reviling us for selfishness."

The Duchess laughed slightly at this sally, then she said kindly:

"I shall make you *my* representative and broker in this speculation, and pledge myself to give you the earliest intelligence about the fields. You may trust my acumen in this matter. If I instruct you to withdraw, if to purchase, don't hesitate."

"Hi can hassure your Grace that hi trust your business faculties and hinstincts more than hi would many, heven of hour smartest City men. Hi will obey your orders to the letter."

He spoke with evident sincerity. If there was one woman whom he sincerely admired, it was the young Duchess Valerie; other men were apt to follow blindly in his footsteps, even as he followed her. Her business gifts and unvaried success made him condone her weakness where this blundering baronet was concerned. He had his weaknesses also, and like her, did not resist.

"Good," she said. "In that case I shall leave you a cheque for this amount. If I say buy, I'll send you an order on my banker for the amount I wish to spend at the same time. Meantime I have some money to pay you for what you did at Cherbourg for me, and another favour to ask from you."

"Now for the other side of the cameo," thought Stephen Belwood as he bent his head and prepared to listen.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DIABOLICAL PLOT.

THE Duchess Valerie, under the compliments and evident admiration of this renowned Stock Exchange magnate, had recovered her courage. She became gracious and condescending, and even went so far as to open her sealskin jacket and display an exquisite toilet underneath. A beautiful woman she was. One that few men could have looked upon, without yielding to the spell.

Her present companion knew, however, that the only admiration she would receive from him, was the tribute which he had already paid to her mental qualities. He was well aware how utterly freezingly she would have crushed and snubbed him, had he dared to compliment her upon her personal charms. Knowing this he schooled himself to be discreet.

"I must compliment you," she began suavely, "on the adroit manner in which you conducted affairs at Cherbourg. They could not possibly have been better managed."

"I am 'appy to 'ave pleased your Grace—so far," he replied quietly.

"Yes, *so far*, you have done admirably. But there is more yet to accomplish before I can depart satisfied for Klondike. You can depend on your manager, Gordon, to carry out his contract, I trust?"

"The liberality with which your Grace has treated

'im halready, through me, with the promise of future hindependence, 'as made him ha most devoted slave. Besides, 'e tells me 'e 'as become sincerely attached to the girl, and will marry her after the divorce."

The Duchess frowned darkly, while a savage glare leaped from her fierce eyes.

"No, I do not desire this sacrifice from him." She burst into a bitter laugh as she added: "Of course, if he wants Hope Eastlake, after she has had a term in prison as a convict, he may please himself. Yet I would prefer that he leave this country for Australia after he has given his evidence, and without *her*."

"Do you wish 'er to be publicly harrested hand charged with some crime—say, theft, for instance?"

He asked this question gravely, as if it were a matter of ordinary business.

"Yes, and as soon as possible," answered the Duchess fiercely. "Can you manage this for me? I want to make it impossible for her ever to live with her husband again. I wish to separate her from her child and make her glad to say she is guilty for the sake of that brat. In fact, I must have her confession to take out to Sir Lewis Eastlake with such clear evidence from outside authorities, that he will not pause to sue for a divorce. Do you comprehend me? Can you do this?"

He pondered seriously for some minutes, sitting down opposite her and resting his chin on his palm, while he stared in front of him. Then he said:

"Yes, I think hit can be done."

"*Think?*" repeated the Duchess scornfully.

"Well, then, hit *can* be done, hif you hare willing to pay the price?"

"I am willing, no matter how much it costs. What will it cost to accomplish all this within the next three weeks?"

"I can't quite say, just hoff the bat, your Grace, but it will cost you a tidy amount. We've bought C[illegible]n already. Then there is the landlady and her husband, Mr. Davies, to provide for for life and pack out of the country. Likewise others who must come in. I have a scheme which I think will work all right. She has been asking me to find her a job as nurse. It just happens that a friend of mine will be wanting one presently, a party I can depend hupon. She will help us to fix the felony charge, but it can't be done for less than fifty thousand. It might even cost more."

"Bah! Let it cost a hundred thousand, so that it is done quickly," cried Valerie impetuously.

Stephen Belwood rose with a resolute air.

"Very well, your Grace; it shall be done, and satisfactorily. In a fortnight from now I'll undertake to have Nurse Eastlake convicted of theft and sentenced to six months', at least, imprisonment, with as bad a record as can be produced against her, only I don't exactly know how we are to get her to own that she is guilty, either of the felony, or of being unfaithful to her 'usband. It is one thing to drag the 'orse to the pond and another to make 'er drink."

"Leave that part of the programme to me to manage," answered the Duchess rising. "She does not know that I am in England, and she still regards me as her friend. You secure the conviction, with the bad record as to her moral character. I shall visit her in prison and shew her the damage she will do to her husband and child if she does not release him

from his bondage. I fancy I can play upon her feelings."

The rest of the interview was occupied in comparing notes, and the Duchess signing a cheque for past and present expenses. Then she rose to depart.

"I am staying at the Hotel Cecil for the time I am in London. If you wish to report progress or require me, wire there and I shall come to you. I hold this business above all others until it is finished."

She did not take his hand, but she bent gracefully as she passed out to her carriage, which speedily rolled away, leaving Stephen Belwood to his reflections.

As she passed out of the office, Dickens, his secretary, came in. He looked at that sealskin muffled bit of perfumery and soft loveliness and sighed.

"Ah, these ladies!" he murmured. "What will they not do to have a dip into the City pie?"

Mr. Stephen Belwood, although so defective in the rudiments of his native language, was like Napoleon the Great, a splendid reader of character. His father had made his fortune in the pawnshops and money-lending business. But he had not the broad and daring speculative abilities of his son. Content with sure and legitimate profits he had fought shy of that delirious maelstrom, the Stock Exchange. Like a certain Bishop, Belwood *père* had seen no necessity for the knowledge of grammar for his son, and Stephen was the result of this singular and mediæval cult. He believed, like the said progressive clerical, in facing only the actualities of life, *i.e.*, in his case, the knowledge of book-keeping and a good judgment in the art of valuing property.

Belwood, senior, had found these accomplishments

quite enough for his earthly wants, therefore why shouldn't they also serve for his son?

He had not seen the necessity of keeping up a large establishment for the amusement of other people. A couple or so of rooms for household purposes in one of his pawn-shops had been quite enough. As for trading in the Bull and Bear Market, he eschewed it as he did all other forms of gambling. If the fathers of children could be certain that only their own proclivities and aspirations would be transmitted to their offspring, then the learned and right reverend Bishop would be right in his desire to abolish all the elegant branches from public schools, and permit only the children of gentlemen to acquire those accomplishments. But as Nature has proved in so many instances, such as Shakespeare, Burns, Carlyle and the great host of illustrious sons of the lower classes, neither the sires nor the Bishop can foretell what each pupil may become. We trust, therefore, that such sentiments will be received at their proper valuation, as abominable re-echoes from the dark ages.

Stephen Belwood had chosen his secretary to supply his own deficiencies. In Mr. Dicky Dickens he had secured a man specially adapted for the duties for which he was engaged. He was cultured, gentlemanly and faithful to the secrets of his chief, as far as his employer revealed himself.

The chief knew exactly how much to reveal to his secretary. He would not, for instance, ask the assistance of this honourable gentleman in such shady transactions as this private business of the Duchess Valerie. This he intended to manage for himself. Mr. Dicky Dickens also did not know anything about those

businesses from which so much income was derived. He believed his chief to be concerned alone in the Stock Exchange.

He also believed implicitly in his chief as a straightforward and honest man, according to the accepted code of the Stock Exchange.

Of course, there are codes and codes of morality. The founder of the Goldenrings, when he followed the British Army to Waterloo, and, knowing that Bonaparte was defeated, spread about the market that the British had lost the battle, might not have been accepted as a moral man by rigid advocates of truth or probity. But as he paid his calls when they were due he was much respected in the commercial world. If a robber, or a pirate acts fairly to his partners, he is called an honest fellow by them. Mr. Jabez Balfour was a respected member of society so long as he paid his calls. It was only when he funked the situation and bolted that he became a criminal.

Dicky Dickens would have repudiated his chief, had he suspected him of doing anything dishonourable. Dicky, however, liked a game of poker, and therefore saw nothing wrong in keeping back certain private tips in order to secure a *coup*. It was only legitimate gambling. He had read the reports of Sir Lewis Eastlake on the Klondike mines, and admired his chief for his punctiliousness in holding back his company from the public so long. He would not have blamed him if he had floated it, even with these discouraging reports. According to the vendors, a great deal of gold had already been taken out of the test holes, and that was basis enough to start any company without being accused of fraud.

With the later reports, however, he considered his chief lacking in his usual enterprise in not coming forward sooner. They held the properties, and although, as yet, they had no independent reports, still they had a surer basis to work on than most companies had. The game of buying and selling shares does not depend upon the stock behind. All depends upon how the market is worked. People invest their money purely as a gamble. They purchase and sell, without a thought of what is behind. A company formed on the purchasing of land in Mars or Venus would have as much chance of being taken up by the British public, as this one formed on the purchase of gold mines in Klondike. Seldom had Stephen Belwood promoted a company on such a sure basis as this present one, therefore, Dicky Dickens seeing his chief grow dilatory about this, formed his own conclusions. He sold as many shares as he could in other directions, and resolved to put all his spare cash into this one.

That day they spent together, reconstructing the prospectus. When Dicky heard that the Duchess Valerie had plunged so largely he was sure of his ground. He even remonstrated with his chief about issuing a prospectus at all. Why give the public such a splendid chance?

"We have six months before us to work the affair," remarked his chief quietly. "I don't feel like risking too much of my own money until I ham quite sure. It will be easy to spread disparaging accounts about when we are sure it is hall right. Let's boom it now."

The prospectus was completed that night, and the company advertised in the papers next day.

They opened their list at ten o'clock and closed it the

same night for London and the following day for the country. The preference shares they allotted to themselves, and the ordinary shares to the public.

There was a wild rush to the bank appointed to take in the advances on the day the list was open.

When the list closed, they had sold the entire number of shares which they had to dispose, and had now their capital made up. It takes months to get ten or twenty pounds in for a charitable purpose. A couple of days are sufficient for the British public to shell out five or six hundred thousand pounds, when such generals as Stephen Belwood take the affair in hand.

The board of directors met on the appointed days and had the most expensive of lunches. There was no business to discuss, because they were waiting. The first dividend would not be declared for the next eight months at least.

Meantime a portion of the capital was expended in fitting out a steamship which had been already secured, and packing off engineers, workmen and plant. They did not spare expenses. There was no necessity. The secretary of Stephen Belwood superintended all the lunches and City banquets. He was a socially-inclined *gourmand* and liked this part of the programme, which his chief did not. Stephen Belwood's habits were known. He did not shine either at conversation or at a feed. He sat through them gravely, silently, lifting the champagne glass to his lips and setting it down untasted. After these City convivialities he would drive home to his palatial residence, to find his attractive wife entertaining a crowd of fashionable and millionaire guests. He passed through his gorgeously-furnished rooms, with the masterpieces of modern art

on the walls chosen for him by his upholsterers, with a bashful air and a wan smile for the guests of his wife. Then, as soon as he could, he would seek his own study, and there have a quiet cup of tea, while he marked down his day's winnings in his private log book.

He had no friends, and no confidants. His splendid-looking wife was as much a stranger to him and his secrets as his secretary was. There was no nursery in that sumptuous house. He was a lone man, without principle, and liberated from all illusions.

He had been left money and the instructions to increase it from his father, and this alone supported, him, for Nature had deprived him of enjoying the good things of life. He was a physical wreck, without even the solace of self-respect.

His vices gave him no pleasure. He spent a good deal on these vices, but he did not enjoy them.

Only one vice remained which gave him any satisfaction, and that he indulged in nightly. His pipe of opium. When his day's labour was over, he would prepare and smoke this drug until he fell asleep on the sofa.

Then, when the house was still, he would wake up, crawl to his solitary bedroom, take his sleeping draught, and thus find oblivion. So passed the life of this solitary money spinner.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MOUSE TRAP.

MONEY was getting very scarce with Hope Eastlake. Yet since she had lodged with Mrs. Hambly she did not feel so despairing. There were none of the rapacious and weekly demands for rent which had appalled her so much before. Mrs. Hambly was an easy-going woman. The sleepy air of Clapham makes people take matters easy under its influence.

Baby, also, that mighty enchanter to a woman, had come to occupy her mind and fill out her time.

She no longer suffered from that helpless and hopeless loneliness, which had so oppressed her at first. The corroding anxiety that had worn her nerves was half wiped away by that soft baby hand. Days which had seemed like weeks now rushed past like hours, while she watched her sacred trust develop week by week.

Her baby boy, her heavenly treasure. What a comfort he brought into that waiting and hungry heart. His presence gave her a new purpose in life. His helpless dependence upon her made her feel resolute and strong. Her shy timidity disappeared when she thought upon her responsibilities and obligations. She *must* get work for the sake of her precious gift.

She had him christened as soon as she was strong

enough to carry him to church. Lewis John, she called him after her husband and her brother. And now, when she watched that tiny face and looked into those wonderful blue eyes, she could almost persuade herself that they were both with her.

One supreme bliss of motherhood was denied to her, through that cruel suspense. She was not able to nurse her baby. This she felt keenly and mourned bitterly over at the time. She was glad afterwards that God had imposed this penance upo[illegible].

Ah! those divine weeks, when she had her baby to hold to her aching heart, until the pain disappeared and the holy calm took its place. The countless cares and duties which filled out the hours of the day, and often kept her awake half the night.

How fearful she had been at first to touch and handle that fragile-looking mite of humanity. How horrified at the callous brutality of the nurse, who treated it with a coarseness and carelessness that seemed murderous to the jealous and fearful mother. Could any baby survive those vigorous thumpings, slappings and scrubbings? Those ruthless bandagings and pinning up? The awful waftings of that brandy-laden breath?

It was a strong and healthy baby, the nurse told the mother, and she felt it must be to come through those fearful ordeals with life. Ah, that happy hour when she saw the broad back of that horrid woman disappear, and she had her baby to herself.

Mrs. Hambly was a great help to her in many ways. She had experience, united to a tender and motherly heart. The happy knack of being able to soothe the ruffled feelings of the young master, and the gift of

knowing exactly what ailed him when he would not be pacified.

Most women, thanks to the beneficent Creator, love children, and the motherly instinct lasts through life. Indeed, the older some women grow the stronger becomes this tender and protective passion. Next to a young mother with her first baby, a grandmother comes for *doatishness*. But, although the loving instinct may be there all right, it is not every woman who can manage children. Mrs. Hambly could, and under her wise instructions Hope Eastlake also learnt the secret quickly. That secret is never bestowed on man any more than the gift of *darning* is.

A sailor learns to mend his pants and shirt, some men learn how to knit mufflers, mittens and socks, but I doubt much if ever the most domestic of tars can approach a woman in the art of darning. I have seen many painful efforts to grip this secret. Sometimes the student almost had it, but, like the cooking of women, he could not be depended upon. One foot would be fairly successful, but the other was a failure.

A widower may also drag up a baby after a fashion, but it is a Spartan sort of bringing up which that baby will receive, and, ten chances to one, it will be an orphan before it is able to toddle.

The writer of these lines, once upon a time, with the help of the father and uncle, brought up a baby from birth until it was a year old. That was in a part of the world where women are scarce.

They took relays of eight hours each out of the twenty-four, and that lively infant kept each watch fully occupied. They each lay down exhausted after they were relieved, yet that baby did not seem quite

satisfied, in spite of their heavy and unrelaxing efforts.

It was nursed and washed enough, goodness only knows. It was kept like the deck of a man-of-war, in apple-pie order. When one lay down to forget, for a few hours, his misery, the other man started fairly ahead, with the bath, the wash-tub and the feeding bottle. They neglected nothing to make that baby happy and comfortable. When they were not promenading with the blessed angel in their arms, they were either looking after pap or the replenishing of the feeding-bottle, or else washing, ironing, and reading up nursery literature. These male nurses had no time to cook for themselves, therefore they stuck for a twelve-month to tinned meats, tea and dampers.

Yet that baby didn't appear satisfied, although fed on the best condensed milk. Always fresh, too, for they made that bottle shine before each refilling. Oh, yes, these men were careful, and acted up to instructions.

At last, driven desperate, dyspeptic and hollow-cheeked, they appealed to that widower. The uncle could not marry because he had taken vows of celibacy. The friend was too young and fearful. The father had been already through the fires, therefore they sacrificed him ruthlessly for the sake of his child.

They packed him off to the nearest town with their savings in his pockets, and during his absence did twelve hours' duty instead of eight. In a month's time he brought up a buxom Irish bride who at once took the difficulty in hand, and settled it with no apparent extra exertion. Since then the author has looked upon the sex as our decided superiors in domestic matters.

Mrs. Hambly was a woman after the order of this Irish bride, and Lewis John Eastlake throve under her hands every hour. His mother also learnt that a baby can stand more bracing up and rough usage than seems possible at the first look at the soft-limbed little mite.

Hope would never have trusted her darling with any other person, but after giving Mrs. Hambly a fair, yet searching trial, she was forced to admit that she might safely leave the future Sir Lewis to the tender mercies of this humble Clapham washerwoman.

She went forth, therefore, and hunted diligently for work. She appealed to her new friend, Dr. Aimhurst, and also wrote to her *older friend*, Mr. Stephen Belwood. She also called at many offices in the City and offered her services as a typewriter. Dr. Aimhurst provided her with her first patient—an old lady who was a martyr to rheumatism and lived in Clapham Park.

The situation had all the appearance about it of being an easy, profitable and permanent post. Her patroness permitted her to run home once a day to see that baby was all right. She was exacting and irritable, as such victims are apt to be, yet she was generous in her terms and prompt in her payment. Hope began to feel after the first week of servitude, quite an affection for her employer. The old lady likewise began to take an affectionate interest in her companion nurse.

Hope was paid weekly; therefore she was able to settle with Mrs. Hambly and also purchase many little things which baby required. She was happy, also, for she was earning her living, and she was able to live on trusting that satisfactory news would come from the

Yukon about her absent husband. When a man or woman has work to do, half the cares of life are killed. It is idleness which makes us morbid. Work is the greatest blessing which God has given to His creature man.

From December first until Christmas, Hope held that situation, and won the respect and friendship of her mistress. But, unfortunately, one afternoon the curate called, who had known where Hope last lodged, and saw her in the room. Up to this date her patient had been confined to her bedroom, so that the visiting priest had only been able to leave his card. He was the curate of the church which Hope had so regularly attended since her arrival in London. He recognised her and regarded her with icy coldness.

So pointedly did he treat her on this occasion that, wounded to the quick, she quitted the drawing-room, with some excuse, and left him with her patient. When she returned, the curate was gone, but the manner of the old lady was entirely changed. She told Hope with chilly brevity that she was now well enough to dispense with her services, paid her a month in advance, and requested her to leave the house that night if possible.

Hope could not understand this treatment at all; yet, as she had not been permanently engaged, she could not well complain. She took her wages and went back to her baby, wondering if fate was against her. Was she never, never to have a settlement in her life?

Dr. Aimhurst heard her story, and looked grim when he learnt that her dismissal had followed the visit of the curate.

"Never mind, my dear; I'll get you another good patient before long. If his reverence had known who you were I think he would have shewn more consideration."

"What do you mean, doctor? I am not going to ask for a nurse's post under the name of Lady Eastlake. It would be too ridiculous."

"Never mind. I guarantee that you will have a kind friend in this curate after this."

The doctor was a veritable prophet. Within the next few days the curate called upon her and paid her the most assiduous attentions. He had no idea that she was the lady of the well-known Sir Lewis Eastlake, he told her, but he would do all he could to help her with his congregation.

Hope felt disgusted with this clerical sycophant. His abject apology was an added insult to his former antagonism; she could not have anything more to do with such a man.

She changed her church promptly, and attended one nearer Clapham. She would no longer sit under such a teacher. Yet, poor man, he had only done what he considered to be his duty to a respectable and wealthy member of his congregation. He had judged Hope, as the world judges people, from her seeming associates and surroundings.

Afterwards, when the rheumaticky old lady asked her to resume her duties as a nurse, Hope consulted her pride and declined. Dr. Aimhurst quite approved of her decision.

Christmas passed, and the New Year, with her baby for her festival. She also helped Mrs. Hambly with her laundry work while waiting for fresh work, and

although her hands had become somewhat redder and coarser, she did not mind that, since they were all so comfortable and happy together. Doubtless Lewis was making his hands red and coarse also, for her sake, wherever he was.

She was passing through the Electric-avenue, Brixton, one evening, when she met her old landlady, Mrs. Solomon Davis. Hope experienced a kind of remorse for having neglected her when she saw how gushingly that good lady greeted her.

"Won't you come next Sunday afternoon?" asked Mrs. Davis eagerly.

"Yes, I think I can manage that; yes, I'll come to see you next Sunday," answered Hope, glad to get rid of this undesirable aquaintance on these terms.

"I can depend upon you, then, my dear."

"Yes, yes,; you can depend upon me," answered Hope, hurrying away and wiping her lips after the parting kiss which Mrs. Solomon Davis had bestowed upon her. Hope knew nothing wrong about this woman, for she was country-bred and unfamiliar with the outward trappings of vice. Her painted visage, so grotesque and undeceiving, made Hope wonder at the vanities of her sex, but awoke no suspicions. The meretricious jewellery and tawdry finery seemed only indexes of the woman's common and vulgar mind. Hope had not expected good breeding in the landlady of a London lodging-house, yet she had seen nothing to warn her against this woman except, perhaps, that she was too ignorant and rapacious, as well as vulgar, to be at all interesting. Yet for all that, whereas she liked Mrs. Hambly and enjoyed going out for her, an indefinable

instinct forced Hope to do her best to avoid the company of Mrs. Davis.

But a promise was sacred in the eyes of Hope, therefore, disagreeable as this promise was, she resolved to keep it, and avoid all future invitations.

Mrs. Solomon Davis watched Hope hurrying away with a lurid gleam in her Oriental eyes.

"Hah, so you're ashamed to be seen with me in the street, are you, my beauty? Well, well, just wait until we are done with you, and then perhaps you won't be quite so horty."

She laughed hoarsely, then spying a friend coming along the street, she joined on, and made this friend treat her to her usual refreshment, brandy-and-soda.

On the Sunday following Hope kept her promise but she did not take her baby with her. She did not mind that badly-drained street for herself, but she was not going to risk her precious Lewis John in any such locality.

She was astonished but by no means delighted at the display, and the company that had also been invited to meet her. If she could have retreated, she would have done so; but it was too late for retreat; she was forced to enter.

———

CHAPTER XVI.

A RUDE AWAKENING.

THIS was the first occasion that Hope had seen Mrs. Solomon Davis as a free hostess. Hitherto she had not been distinguished for her lavishness or courtesy towards her lodgers.

But now she had emerged from her shell of reserve, she appeared as if resolved to conduct her entertainment on a Sardanapalian scale. Hope had, in her ignorance, supposed she would enjoy a cup of tea and slice of cake or bread and butter. She found a banquet being prepared and a festive company assembled to consume it.

There were Mr. and Mrs. Davis, the two young ladies from upstairs, with a gentleman for each, and, to her own ineffable disgust and uneasiness, the importunate and foppish Walter Gordon was present as a partner for herself. Mrs. Davis evidently believed, like Noah, in pairing her guests.

There were decanters of spirits and rows of bottles of wine on the side-board. A cold roasted turkey and sirloin of beef stood on the table, the sirloin at one end and the turkey at the other, while from the kitchen came the mixed and heavy aroma of cooking. But no signs of tea were anywhere visible. Evidently the present company did not indulge in that beverage so late in the day. They preferred the lighter wines of sunny

France, the wines that froth and sparkle in the bowl, for as Hope entered she observed airy bells rising up within each charged glass.

"You are just in time, my dear," cried her late landlady jovially. "We were just about to begin. Come and take off your hat and cloak."

Hope stood just inside the door and gazed around her with cold astonishment. She had expected to meet vulgar people, but not half-drunken blackguards, as these men evidently were. The three women also were flushed and disreputable-looking, in spite of their gorgeous toilets. In an instant the character of the house and inhabitants burst upon her like a lurid flash-light from hell.

This was why the good doctor had entreated her to leave at once. This was why the curate had warned her late patient against her, as now she felt it was his duty to do.

Hope Eastlake was a shy and innocent woman, the last person in the world to have stood upon her dignity with ignorance or vulgarity. But she was neither a fool nor a coward, and at the present moment her duty was clear to her.

Here was vice and debauchery flaunting shamelessly before her. This painted Jewess had brought her there to degrade her. Mr. Stephen Belwood surely could not have known the character of this woman when he brought her here.

She exonerated her supposed friend, as she now did the mistaken parson. Stephen Belwood must have been deceived, as she had evidently been.

The blame lay with these low, wicked employés of the money-lender, this wretched, rat-like man, Solomon

Davis, and his accomplice, that smooth-faced, hypocritical coxcomb and scoundrel, Walter Gordon.

A hot wave of outraged modesty and bitter indignation swept over her, as she felt how her reputation had been besmudged. After being all those months in this den of vice, who would believe in her innocence now?

The debased wretches saw her standing looking at them with whitening cheeks and darkening eyes of despair. They put down her sudden agitation to fear.

"Don't stand there, my dear, like a stucco saint, but let me introduce you to these friends of mine, whom you don't yet know."

"I do know you all now, and what you are," gasped Hope huskily.

She could not for the moment move, but leant helplessly against the wall. A sickening horror and faintness gripped at her heart.

"Then if you know us you may as well sit down and enjoy yourself while you are young. Give her a glass of fizz, Watty Gordon; that will bring back the colour to her pretty face."

"Let me out! Let me out!" moaned Hope faintly. "I shall die if I stay here another instant."

"Oh, no, my deary, you won't," answered Mrs. Davis, getting up and shutting the room door, against which she placed her massive back. "You are only about to begin to live now. Don't shrink from me. I am the same party as you have lived with for months, neither better nor worse, although just that time older; more is the pity. These two young ladies are just as good as you are, my fine lady, in the eyes of those who know where you've been living. As for the gents—well, they are jolly good fellows, all three,

and Wat Gordon there is as far gone on you as I ever seed a young fellow gone."

"Let me out! Let me out!"

"What nonsense, my dear! You ain't got a shred of character left now, in this street, at least. As well hang for a sheep as a lamb. It don't matter one bit, as far as you are concerned, how long or how short a time you stay. Your character's gone already, and it would be a pity to see a fine gal like you chuck everythink away. Here, Wat Gordon, bring over that champagne and comfort your own Donah, for I ain't used to public speechifying. It's too dry work for me."

Mrs. Davis moved aside to permit the sleek and smooth villain to pass her; then, seeing him in possession of the door, she resumed her place at the table, and gulped down a glassful of wine.

"Some people are fools, to be sure, and don't know what is good for them," she said, as she spread herself out.

Hope saw the hateful wretch approaching; the underbred wretch who had intruded himself so much upon her during these past months. She had considered him an empty-headed but harmless enough fool before; the sort of pretty figure that is kept in drapers' shops to show customers about.

She read him now for what he was—empty-headed but vicious. A cold, remorseless and conceited fool; and that is the most hopeless of the species. With the ken of his besmudging came a clearness of vision that tore the veil of credulity for ever from her eyes.

He stood where the landlady had done, with his back against the door, which opened inwards. He was a tall and dressy man, with a double watch-chain

across his spotted vest, and a profusion of jewellery about him. He was perfumed, also, almost as strongly as a musk-rat. How Hope afterwards abhorred the odour of heliotrope for the sake of this caddish beast!

He was leering upon her like a satyr, and holding, as the satyr of old might have held, a *tumbler* of champagne. In spite of Mrs. Davis's encouraging harangue, he was just a trifle dry-lipped and nervous, as he faced the fair young woman whom he and those had injured so greatly.

"Let me pass, sir."

Hope recovered her courage at the sight of the soulless bacchant. He seemed easier to manage than the fat and loathsome mistress of the house. She drew herself up with quiet, icy dignity, and for an instant the animal was subdued.

"What! Oh, my! Are you going to let her go, Wat?" shrieked one of the *ladies*, as she saw him move aside.

"No, not exactly; at least, not yet," he shouted weakly, resuming the place he had moved instinctively from.

"Beast!" said Hope bitterly, as she snatched the glass suddenly from his hand and pitched it with all her force at his face.

She saw him put up both hands to his face and stagger backwards with an ugly oath. She heard the sound of the broken tumbler as it crashed and tinkled on the floor, with the angry cries of those within.

But she was free, if degraded to the dust. She fled from that hateful room and closed the door behind her. She knew the trick of the front door, and was

out on the street before those within could recover their presence of mind or think of following her.

Straight home to her baby she flew, and then, when she had him once more in her arms, she felt almost safe and purified from that gruesome contamination.

Mrs. Hambly, fortunately, was not a very observant woman, so that Hope escaped awkward questions about her agitated appearance. The old lady thought she was cold, and bade her warm herself well before taking baby. A good wash and brush, with a cup of tea, took the stunned feeling from her.

Then she began to think upon her position with anguish and dismay. Her cheeks tingled with shame as she considered the countless eyes that must have observed her conversing in public with those vile wretches. The tales that must have been concocted about her! Ignorance and innocence were no shields and hardly any consolation to her. The parson honestly believed in her infamy. She was not quite certain if even her good friend, Dr. Aimhurst, could quite think her guiltless.

Two things she must do without delay—hide herself in some other part of London, and inform Stephen Belwood what kind of men he employed. He must not be imposed upon any longer.

She, therefore, sat down that same evening and wrote to the company promoter a full account of the treatment she had received that afternoon. She felt sure that the others would try to prejudice him, but she prayed to God to come to her help and hide her undeserved shame.

It was a bitter sacrifice to her pride to have to im-

plore Stephen Belwood to keep this matter a secret from her husband. Her soul shrank with fear at the thought of letting him know by letter her misfortunes. She, who had always been so unsuspicious, guileless and candid, felt the necessity of concealment at this crisis of her life. Indeed, she considered herself now in the light of a traitress to her absent husband when forced to confide in another man.

But how could she convince anyone that she could have been so blind for so many months? How could she ever kill those calumnies and silence those evil tongues?

She must live after this in the constant dread of exposure, in the constant horror lest her husband should hear those stories and believe them.

It was strictly necessary, therefore, that she should confide in the man who took her to that evil house, and open his eyes, so that he might not commit the mistake again. She had grown suspicious now. She would never again take people upon trust. But it did not occur to her that any man in the position that Stephen Belwood held could be an accomplice, far less the director, of those infamous wretches.

Poor girl, she was very ignorant still in the world's lore of craft and duplicity!

She was sitting the next afternoon with her baby in her arms, and thinking what was she to do with her future, when a cab drove up, and the man she had written to appeared.

He came in, white-faced, and with a fine air of being shocked and concerned about him. He was an adept at putting on such expressions.

"Believe me, madam, Hi acted with hall honesty

and good faith, when I took you to Mrs. Davis. Other people whom I 'ave recommended seemed satisfied. Her 'usband being so long in my service, I thought, if poor, at least she was a honest lady."

"I am quite satisfied to know that you were, as I was, mistaken in those people: but it has placed me in a horrible position," answered Hope sadly.

"'Orrible, most 'orrible, my dear lady, and I can never forgive myself," he said, with such deep contrition that her gentle heart forgave him at once.

"'Owever, I have done all I can to repair my herror. Walter Gordon and Solomon Davis are no longer in my hemployment. I have sacked—hem—dismissed them both promptly, and likewise threatened them that if they dared hever to breathe a word about you or recognise you at any time, I would have them harrested and severely punished."

"Can you do this?" said Hope, surprised.

"Rather! You keep your mind quite easy. I 'ave the whip 'and of them both. They will keep quiet enough for their own sakes."

"It is a dreadful misfortune," said Hope drearily. "Now I shall have to leave this place and go amongst strangers. What to do I know not, for I have hardly any money left to move."

"I must see to that, now that I have been the unwitting cause of your disgrace. In fact, I came here for that purpose. A client of mine, a wealthy lady, who lives in Notting Hill, 'as asked me to recommend a nurse to her. She is down at present with influenza. If you ain't afraid of the hinfection you can have that post at once. You will be quite comfortable and safe there, for she will take my word for your suitability."

Hope looked doubtful for a moment.

In spite of her trust in this man's honesty she was inclined to think he was too easily imposed upon. His next words, however, reassured her.

"She is a cousin of mine, and the wife of one of our board directors."

That was enough for Hope. The house of a City company director must be, like the wife of Cæsar, above suspicion.

"You can leave your baby behind, I 'ope. It wouldn't do to take the son and heir of Sir Lewis Eastlake near influenza."

"Oh, yes, he will be quite safe with my landlady here," answered Hope a little more cheerfully. "And when may I go?"

"To-night, if you like. The sooner the better, for my poor cousin is very badly."

"I should like to go to-night," replied Hope.

"Very well. I'll go straight away and prepare her for your coming. Meantime take this five-pound note to defray your expenses; and there is the lady's address."

He wrote the name and address on one of his own cards, then he rose and said good-bye.

When he had left her Hope took up the card and read it:

Mrs. Algernon Churchill Champion,
St. John's Villa,
Notting Hill, W.

It was a well-known name, which she had often seen heading prospectuses; therefore she was satisfied that in this, at any rate, Mr. Stephen Belwood had done his utmost to atone for his past mistake.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ENTRAPMENT OF HOPE.

IT was a mighty wrench to part from her baby, even for a few weeks. But when people have to work for their daily bread, such sacrifices have to be made constantly. Hope was satisfied that she could not have a better substitute for herself than Mrs. Hambly. Baby Lewis John would have all the care that, even with her love, she could give him. Therefore, she crushed down the latent jealousy that exists in every mother, and made her preparations.

These were easily made, and a small hand-bag held all that she would likely require during her absence. When she reached St. John's Villa, she found that she was expected, and at once taken into the sick chamber.

Mrs. Algernon Churchill Champion was a pretty woman, of the soft, well-fed and creamy-complexioned order, one who evidently liked to be surrounded with every comfort. The whole house indeed was replete with luxury and conducted on an easy and extravagant system. In the kitchen more waste went on unchecked than might have run an establishment four times its size.

The tokens of wealth were everywhere apparent, also of reckless and careless profusion. Costly pictures lined the walls, statues and *bric-à-brac* were scattered about in every direction.

To a lady of such extreme good taste as Hope was

this cram of costly articles did not inspire her with much respect for her employers. They were rich people, and had filled their abode with artistic and valuable objects; but they were too ostentatious in their display, and too careless about their acquisitions to be admired.

Mr. Champion was a jovial young fellow, who bore already about him the traces of being a *bon vivant.* Each night when he returned from business he brought friends to dinner. What dinners they were, too, and breakfasts and lunches, as well as suppers! It seemed as if the dining-table was never empty. The whole house was redolent of meat, drink and money.

Mrs. Champion was not nearly so prostrate as Hope had expected. For a patient suffering from influenza she had a marvellous appetite.

One thing, however, should have pleased the nurse: she was not a very exacting patient, and soon treated Hope with the confidence and familiarity of an old friend. She had two children, a boy and a girl of two and four years of age. These, however, had been sent down to Brighton for a change.

It appeared almost like a sinecure, this post of sick nurse to Hope. There was so little to do, and the payment was so good. She could not object, of course, so long as Mrs. Champion fancied she required a nurse. It was, however, more as a companion than in the other capacity that she was employed after the first day or two.

Hope felt a little bit ashamed and as if she was an impostor when all she had to do was to gossip or listen to the lady's small talk; read silly novels to her or discuss about her dresses and jewellery.

On the subject of the jewellery Hope was at first a little uneasy. With the same carelessness these were left in open drawers and cases, and were so valuable that she felt constrained to remonstrate with Mrs. Champion for her want of thought.

"You really ought to keep them under lock and key. It is positively putting temptation in the way of the servants."

"Oh, my servants are all trustworthy," replied Mrs. Champion with a light laugh. "They know at least when they are well treated, which comes to the same thing. They know also that, although my husband winks at small offences, he isn't the man to pass over the deliberate theft of my trinkets. I never have locked up anything."

"And have you never been robbed?"

"Only once, and that was by a new footman. The articles were, however, all traced and recovered, and the thief convicted. He is still undergoing his sentence. Our people know exactly how much we can stand, and never go over the line. And for housebreakers—well, neither locks nor bars will stop those gentry if they go in for business."

"But I would put what I don't require into the Bank where it would be safe, even from burglars," persisted Hope.

"Well, you are a peculiar woman, Nurse Eastlake," cried Edith Champion in astonishment. "Now what would the use of jewellery be to any one if it was banked? I might just as well sell it right away. It is one of the joys of life to have them all about me, so that I may look at them and try them on as I feel disposed. The same with my dresses. They were

bought to be worn, looked at and admired, not shut up in a banker's safe. I'd be just miserable without them in my dressing-room."

Hope did not speak any more about the subject. She gauged the depths of her employer's mind and exonerated her for her childishness. Those trashy stories written by girl authoresses who had no more experience of men or women than had children in the nursery, were her delight. Hope had to read these crude and nauseous imitations for hours at a time, until her head ached and her soul grew sick with the vapid, flabbily erotic and long extended rubbish.

She tried, on her own behalf, to interest this mindless yet, seemingly harmless, City speculator's wife, in the works of those few authors who are still trying to keep up the art of romance—those limited number of men and women who reverence their art, and strive truly to depict life.

Mrs. Champion good-naturedly sent for the books which Hope recommended, but while Hope was interested in the reading, her poor, romance-debauched patient got the headache, which Hope had suffered from over the trash. Mrs. Champion preferred her champagne sugary and her sherry full flavoured; she could not rise above the nursery young lady authoresses.

Yet she appeared good-tempered and considerate of others, if self-indulgent, and trivial. Hope had not been many days beside her patient before she grew really to like the little gormandiser.

Mr. Stephen Belwood came one evening to dinner with Mr. Champion, and both came up for a few moments to the sick chamber. They chatted pleasantly about City matters. Things were booming, they said

and although Hope didn't understand what "booming" exactly meant, still, from their cheerful faces, she thought it must be something good.

For five days she was comparatively happy in this abode of luxury. Then the catastrophe fell with the suddenness of an avalanche on an Alpine valley.

One afternoon, as she was reading that highly moral, instructive and intellectual romance, "The Sorrows of Satan," to her absorbed patient, the maid brought in a card and gave it to her mistress.

"Show the man in, Jane. Don't you think Marie Corelli is a great genius?"

"No," replied Hope. "I think from what I have already read in this book, that she must be very spiteful and conceited, though."

Next moment a man entered, with his hat in his hand. He was a quiet man, with a clean-shaven, sharp face, and while he bowed, his quick eyes observed everything in the room.

"Well, have you discovered anything, Mr. Peters?" asked Mrs. Champion curtly.

"Yes, marm. The jewels were pawned, and have been traced all right. I only require to find the tickets, and I guess they are not far away."

"My dear," said Mrs. Champion, turning to Hope, "don't be disturbed. When you spoke to me about robbers the other day, I had already lost some valuable jewellery, and had sent instructions to Scotland-yard."

"Indeed," answered Hope faintly. A deadly presentiment was upon her that some fresh troubles were coming.

"You will not mind, I am sure, but this officer must do his duty and search all the boxes and people in the house. Isn't that so, Mr. Peters?"

"Exactly, mum."

"Dreadfully unpleasant, isn't it, nurse? However, it will soon be over. Just touch the bell and have the servants up here. We must leave that naughty Prince Lucio till after we know who the present sinner is, then we can go on with his adventures"

Hope went over and touched the electric bell. Then she resumed her seat and laid the Sorrows of his Satanic Majesty down, star upwards, on the table.

In a few moments, the bedroom was crowded with sullen domestics. The butler, the footman, page, groom, coachman, housemaids, chambermaids and bloated cook.

They delivered the keys of their boxes over willingly, and then Mr. Peters, with a couple of assistants, went the round of the house, one blue-coated, metal-buttoned gentleman, specially dear to the cook and scullery, guarding the door.

Half an hour passed, while Mrs. Champion, always considerate, asked the butler to hand round her own private decanter of brandy to the company. Even the policeman wasn't forgotten.

Hope Eastlake waited, with her heart like lead and her eyes filmy with suspense. The others seemed to take this search easy enough, but to her it was an intolerable agony.

She had only been once outside since she entered that house. Once for a hasty run over to Clapham to see Mrs. Hambly and her child. Had the robbery taken place while she was away? Would she be in any way implicated! God! the thought was maddening.

She accepted a half-glass of brandy and gulped it

down with parched lips. Would she never be free from ignoble scenes? She thought the servants regarded her with suspicious glances, as the only stranger amongst them. Mrs. Champion, however, was sitting opposite, looking at her with a friendly smile.

At last Mr. Peters appeared with his two assistants. He drew near to Mrs. Champion while his subordinates stood beside the policeman.

"I have found the tickets, mum, all right."

"Where?"

"In this young woman's hand-bag," answered the detective, pointing to Hope.

A wild shriek burst from the lips of the wretched woman as she tried to rise. Then merciful oblivion came to her.

When next she came to her senses she was in prison on a charge of theft. What had gone wrong with her? Some nerve or vein had apparently burst in her brain and left her dazed and benumbed.

Were demons in charge of her fate, who were driving her to the lowest depths? She began, for the first time in her life, to believe that she was God-abandoned.

The gaol authorities were kind enough to her. They had sent their doctor to look after her. When he saw that his restoratives were effective and that she was sensible, he left her to the prison discipline.

A narrow cell with a small pallet bed, two blankets and the light at one side of the door. She lay down and dozed through the night, not yet being able to realise her awful position.

In the morning a female warder came to her door, and ordered her, in harsh tones, to rise, make her bed,

and tidy her cell. Then she was marched out to a small yard, and kept there until it was time for breakfast. Her breakfast was a mug of weak tea and a slice of dry bread.

After breakfast she was sitting on her plank couch, not brooding, only still stunned and benumbed, when the door opened and a gentleman came in. He was the solicitor who had been employed in her defence.

"Who sent you here?" she asked wearily.

"Mr. Stephen Belwood, your friend."

"Does he still believe in me?"

"Yes, he thinks there has been some mistake. Inform me of all your movements since you entered the abode of Mrs. Champion."

She went over her movements mechanically. She had no longer any hope that either lawyer or any archangel could lift the evil spell from her which was over her.

Hope Eastlake had lost the significance of her christian name. She might now have been called Despair Eastlake.

One thing only she implored her solicitor, and that was, that she should not be known as Lady Eastlake.

"Let me go down to oblivion as Nurse Eastlake."

"The case is very bad against you, but I would not plead guilty for all that," observed the lawyer as he left her.

"I shall not plead guilty, you may be sure, since I am innocent," she cried, drawing herself up.

"Yet the sentence may be lighter if you do," remarked her lawyer gently.

"What does it matter whether it is a month or a

year or two less, if I am found guilty?" she said, with a shrug of her shoulders and a soulless laugh.

She was arraigned and found guilty. The case was almost too clear against her. It really looked like a stage scene, too complete in its details to be quite natural.

Yet the judge, the jury, and the advocates were satisfied with the stage effects. The past of Nurse Eastlake had been traced up by those sleuth-hounds, the detectives. She was proved to have lived for nine months in a questionable house. The pawnbroker's assistant identified her as the person who had pledged the stolen jewellery. The pawn-tickets were discovered in her hand-bag.

While this persecuted woman listened to the evidence she could hardly believe but that, in some moment of mental lapse, she had done the acts ascribed to her.

She listened to her sentence with a strange and absent smile. It looked to the judge callous and hardened, with the defiant air of a habitual criminal. He wished he had known more of her antecedents, he would have been more severe.

"Six months' hard labour!"

"Thanks, my Lord," she said quietly, and then she was led away down the stairs from the dock.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SACRIFICE.

"If my husband wishes to divorce me I shall not appeal, but I cannot write a lie, and defame myself when I am innocent."

"Very well, Lady Eastlake, since that is your decision; your husband shall divorce you certainly, and repudiate your child, and so shall I, then it may go to the workhouse. Good-bye, I shall not attempt to argue the matter further with you."

"Stay for a moment, madam—your Grace, and let me think what is best to do. What is my duty? O God, do not forsake me altogether in this hour of my uncertainty."

The harrowing interview between the despairing Hope Eastlake and her implacable foe, the Duchess Valerie, had an appropriate setting. A cell in the country gaol to which the hapless prisoner had been removed after her conviction.

Last time the rivals had faced each other had been in her Grace's dressing room at Falaise. Then the Duchess had good cause to congratulate herself on her superior attractions, even although unknowing that the other had won the game.

Now she was triumphant, and the contrast was more striking than ever; sorrow, anxiety, shame, and hopeless despair had robbed that delicate face of its

fairness. The prison barber had shorn her golden tresses, and the prison dressmaker disguised her form of all its grace completely. The most queenly woman on earth would be hideous with a felon's costume on. It is in this way that the government contrives to punish female criminals, by wounding them on the one point on which all women are sensitive and weak—their clothing. A woman can take extra work, or less rations, much more philosophically than a man can, but the gorge of the most hardened criminal rises against the garb she is compelled to wear during her incarceration. They become morbid, brooding upon the figure they cut before the eyes of the warder. They get hysterical and tear up their clothes. They become murderous and more hardened and demoniac than they were before, in their outraged vanity, self-disgust, and loathing of this corrupting dress. In fact, all that the silent system does to injure the mental and moral nature of the male convicts, this diabolical punishment does to the women.

The parsons, priests, and missionaries find themselves sadly handicapped by this hideous fashion. No woman can possibly listen to religious instruction of any kind while her mind is filled with that nightmare. She never forgets it for an instant, awake or asleep. It is the horror and the hatred of her prison days, and fills her with a bitter hatred and deadly sense of degradation that slay all hopes of her redemption. Before the female convict gets callous on this point she must have lost for ever all sense of order, shame and womanhood. She has become a mindless and loathsome beast. Therefore, I contend, that to inflict this outrage on feminine humanity is as barbarous as

branding them on the cheek, or slicing off their ears and noses.

This poor and innocent prisoner, however, had no thought of such small vanities as her shorn hair or shapeless gown at present. Neither did she care how she looked to this beautiful and pitiless enemy who now watched her with such scornful eyes.

It is written that the Roman child Saint Agnes, blushed with modest shame, even under the torture, when her executioners tore her robe from her shoulders. If so, then her torture was less engrossing than that which Hope Eastlake was now enduring.

She sat on her hard pallet, with her thin fingers clasping and unclasping each other, her face grey with pain, and her upturned eyes bloodshot and burning with sleeplessness. The muscles of her face twitched in her convulsive spasms, while round her forehead seemed pressing a red-hot iron band. It was hard to think, or pray, with that seething and surging in her brains, and that deadly despair petrifying her heart.

One idea only seemed to stand out clear—her child. One duty alone called for her consideration, what would be best for her baby? He must not be made to share her misery.

Her husband had now faded completely from her mental vision. The Duchess had wiped away her last hope and faith in him. If he had ever loved her she was convinced now that he regretted that weakness. She had lost her husband and her reputation. She had lost her child, for she must now give him up. Now she was asked to complete the sacrifice and declare herself unworthy to hold him ever again to her heart.

"Oh, my baby—my precious darling! What shall I do, what shall I do?" she moaned, casting up her eyes to the darkened ceiling and trying to reason the sacrifice from all its sides.

And the Duchess Valerie, the woman who had conquered through that resistless weapon, gold, stood over against her, waiting and watching her with curling lips and half-closed insolent eyes.

There was no longer any doubt as to the result of that inward debate between truth and a mother's love. Valerie had hemmed her in until now there could be no escape for this unwary victim. She had poured out her money like waste water to accomplish her fell purpose. She had gone to work with the craft and patience of a true Oriental. It was only a poor weak and unsuspecting girl whom she had employed her mighty forces against, so she took no credit in winning at last.

She stood now leaning upon her costly umbrella, with her heavy fur wrappers gathered about her, and on her head the daintiest of winter hats. A subtle and delicious perfume stole from her and filled the dismal cell with its penetrating fragrance. Outside in the lobby the warders were sniffing it up with dreamy delight as it crept through the grating.

Glowing with colour, and fresh in her superb young beauty as a dewy rose; with everything that wealth, fashion, art and exquisite taste could produce to adorn a face and form which Nature had already made perfect; the contrast between the Duchess and her degraded victim was too marked—too wantonly and unutterably cruel.

Her ostensible purpose in coming here was a chari-

table one, to adopt the child of the prisoner, and thus relieve the parish of all future trouble. She therefore found no difficulty about procuring admission.

The prisoner was glad also, at first, to see her grace. It seemed kind on her part to come so soon to visit her.

But Valerie, as far as Hope was concerned, felt there was no longer any need to feign a part. In a very few moments, and with incisive, cutting sentences, she declared her projects.

"If you have not been criminal, you have been a blind fool. That, in your case, means the same thing.'

"I am innocent," replied Hope gently.

"So every convict says. You may or may not be. I am not here to discuss that. I am here to try if possible to help those whom you have disgraced—your husband and child."

"His child also," put in Hope.

The Duchess shrugged her shoulders contemptuously, and then continued: "Have you heard from Sir Lewis since he left England?"

"One letter only—a short note written with pencil," answered Hope drearily.

"Ah! I have had those letters from him. There they are. You had better read them and then we can discuss what to do."

She tossed the letters over to Hope, who saw with bitterness that they were of later date than the one she had received, and written on good paper, with ink.

They were short and commonplace, for Sir Lewis was, as we have said, neither a fluent nor a voluminous correspondent. There was nothing in them that the most jealously-disposed spouse could find fault with,

But the damning point about them lay, in her eyes, that they had been written after the one scrap which was sent to her; and that, while he could write three times to his friend, he had not written again to his wife. As she recalled those long months of loneliness and suspense, she felt that she could not condone that wanton heartlessness. This froze her heart.

She read also how he had been disappointed in the gold claims, and that there seemed little likelihood of his getting back the money he had lost. These tidings partly prepared her for what the Duchess said next.

"I suppose you can understand now how criminally you acted when you inveigled Sir Lewis into this fatal entanglement."

Hope hung her head at these biting words; she felt like a criminal for having yielded to her lover's entreaties.

"You—even *you* must see also that he cannot have cared much for you, since he has not written to you."

Hope now felt that, without those harsh accents which made her wince, as one does when struck across the raw. Yet they did her some good also, for they cleared her dazed brain a little. She was now listening for the rest to be said with a premonition of what it was to be.

"He is a beggar now, and would be a poor outcast all his life, while he was bound to you. It is fortunate, therefore, both for my friend and your child——"

"His child also, madam," again returned Hope, looking up, to see once more that contemptuous shrug from her visitor.

"It is fortunate, therefore, that your own folly will

enable him to free himself from *you*, and marry a lady who can reinstate him in his former lost position."

"You are the lady, I suppose, who is willing to do this *after his divorce?*" asked the miserable woman, with a swift glance at her visitor, and a subdued bitterness.

The young Duchess drew herself up and threw back her head haughtily. Then she said coldly:

"Yes. I will marry Sir Lewis Eastlake, and do my utmost to wipe off the disgrace which his first wife placed upon his name."

She intended to be very dignified, but her hatred and passion got the upper hand of her. With sparkling eyes and clenched teeth she hissed savagely:

"Wretched woman, did you know that I loved him and expected him to propose to me when I came to Falaise?"

"I thought you loved him then, and for his sake felt sorry that it was too late," answered Hope simply.

"Then you do not wish to ruin him?"

"No, madam, I shall not stand in *your* way."

"You will confess that you are guilty as a wife?"

"No, I cannot do that, for it would be false."

"He can get the divorce without your confession, for your paramour——"

"O madam, spare me!" moaned Hope, dropping on her knees. The Duchess smiled on her then like a she-devil.

"Walter Gordon, your—friend, has already made a confession."

"Then he is a perjured villain!" cried the tortured woman passionately, as she sprang to her feet.

"That may be," sneered Valerie; "only it will be as

difficult to prove as your innocence of the theft for which you are here now. Listen to my advice, my good woman, and take it or leave it. I don't care how you decide, only your child's future depends upon your decision."

Hope sank back on her pallet and muttered: "Say on, I am listening."

"If you write out this confession of your guilt, I shall adopt your son, and bring him up to fill his position as the son and heir of Sir Lewis Eastlake. No expense shall be spared on his education. If you do not write this confession, I shall not do anything for him at all. Sir Lewis will repudiate him, and—he must go to the workhouse meanwhile."

"Why do you wish this from me?" asked Hope piteously.

"Because, if you do so, it will save a great deal of sordid detail in the Divorce Court. No man need be mentioned as your co-respondent, and only a few lines of print in these dreadful prying papers, which will quickly be forgotten. It will be better to leave the public to think you went wrong with some scion of the upper classes. It is too utterly disgusting to reveal to the world that Lady Eastlake was the companion of a Walter Gordon."

"Oh! how can I write a lie, even for the sake of my child?" wailed Hope, wringing her hands frantically.

"It is for your own sake, and your husband's sake, as well as for your infant, I ask you to do this. Think of being associated with the book-keeper of a money-lender. Think of a *Walter Gordon!*"

"What does it matter who it is, if I confess myself

guilty when I am innocent?" groaned Hope, clasping her head.

"Decide quickly, for my time is up," whispered Valerie. "Your baby as the legitimate heir to mine and your husband's possessions and title, or a beggar and a workhouse brat."

"Enough!" answered Hope faintly, completely worn out. "Give me paper and pen. I shall write the lie for the sake of my child!"

Duchess Valerie had everything in her reticule, for she knew she was safe to win. She got them out promptly, and placed them before her victim.

"Dictate what you require of me," said Hope passively. She had agreed to the sacrifice of the most precious thing woman retains—her honour. What did the words matter?

Valerie saw at a glance how stunned her victim was. She did not want more than a few words, so she said:

"Write: 'Dear husband, forgive me and forget me. I have been a false wife to you, and I have gone where my inclinations lead me. I shall never trouble you more.—Your erring wife, HOPE WALDRED.'"

Hope wrote the words mechanically.

She was about to sign her name when the Duchess stopped her.

"Wait a moment. We had better have the warder in as a witness."

The sacrifice was completed. In her sealskin reticule Duchess Valerie carried the broken reputation of her rival, and Hope Eastlake, or Waldred, lay an inert mass on her prison pallet.

CHAPTER XIX.

LEWIS JOHN IS PROVIDED FOR.

Now that the ruin of her rival was accomplished there was nothing more for the Duchess of Valerie to do in England. However, as we have seen, she was a woman who kept her vows and promises, whether these were baleful or beneficent. Having, therefore, promised to adopt the child, she lost no time in doing this.

Her first step in this direction was to visit Mrs. Hambly and see Lewis John. Valerie did not care much for babies, but even if she had loved them this particular infant would have been an exception. As she gazed with sombre eyes upon this innocent and smiling token of her rival's powers, the spirit of murder crept into her jealous heart. To grip that soft and milky throat, or press her hand over those smiling moist rose lips, would have been a passionate and delirious joy. She shuddered with the strength of her desire to quench that budding life, and turned her gaze away.

"I presume that you are fond of the child," she said, with a forced smile parting her dry lips.

"Yes, ma'am." Mrs. Hambly was not aware of the rank of her visitor. Valerie had merely introduced herself as an old friend of the father and mother. "Yes, ma'am. I am fond of all children, but Lewis John here is like one of my own to me. His poor unfortunate mother knew she could trust him to me."

"In that case you had better continue to look after

him, if you think his mother would like you better than a stranger to be his nurse."

"I am sure she would, ma'am, poor dear victim that she is."

"I have promised his mother to adopt him, and bring him up as a gentleman, therefore I wish you to devote all your time to his management. Can you do this if I make it worth your while?"

"Yes, ma'am. Laundry work ain't so easy or profitable for any one to let it stand in the way of a better job."

"Then that is decided," said the Duchess indifferently. "You are in my service after this, and your sole duty will be to attend to this infant. You must spare no expense, but get everything that he may require. My solicitor will pay you what salary you fix your services at, also settle all bills and accounts. Have you a good doctor here?"

"Yes, ma'am. Dr. Aimhurst is the best man and the cleverest doctor in England, barring none."

Valerie smiled more broadly than before.

"You can employ Dr. Aimhurst while you and the child stay in London, but I wish you to take him to the country as soon as possible, where he may have fresh air. Not just yet, but as soon as the weather will permit. My solicitor will take a house for you when you have decided where you would like to live. This good doctor will advise you. I think that is all we need arrange at present."

She thought for a moment as she sat drumming her gloved fingers on the table, and then she said suddenly:

"By the way, it will be best for this child, and his

mother also, not to see each other more than is strictly needful. I wish him to grow up under the impression that his mother is dead."

"O, ma'am, surely you ain't going to part mother and child. She is innocent as this baby of what she was convicted of. I can swear that, knowing her as I do, and as you must also, if you are an old friend of hers."

The Duchess looked, with a slight puckering of her arched brows, at Mrs. Hambly. While she frowned she registered another vow in her mind, which was that she would get rid of this officious old woman, as soon as she could find a more suitable nurse for the brat. She said, however, smoothly:

"There are many good reasons why this child should not know anything about his mother when he grows up. Reasons which his mother fully understands and endorses."

"It will break 'er 'eart, poor gal," answered the kindly old woman, with a catch in her voice, while her eyes grew misty. "Never have I seen any mother so bound up in 'er blessed baby as this one's mother was. She'd go through fire and water to save him from a scratch. Yes, ma'am, it'll break 'er 'eart, as it a'most do mine to think of it. Pardon me, ma'am, for seeming to hobject, and kindly excuse them tears. But if you could have seen that young lonely wife and mother with her baby. How she watched him afilling hout as if it 'ad been the most wonderful work in creation—which it is all the same—the growing of a baby from a little bit of red shapelessness into a blooming cherub. Had you seen how she watched these little legs and harms afilling out until he became

what he is now, a butter-ball of creamy whiteness, softness and beauty. Look at them harms, ma'am, and them fat kicking legs, did you hever see the likes of them for shapeliness and cunning dimples? Look at them wrists and hankles; them little loves of 'ands and them purty feet. Could any woman let this go from her arter she had once howned it, kissed it and cuddled it to her bosom?"

The old lady was not able to see the charms she was so freely exhibiting to those unsympathetic and loathing eyes. She could see neither the baby that she was wetting with her hot tears, nor the woman she was so vainly appealing to in behalf of the absent mother.

And the baby lay placidly in her lap, sucking at its bottle of milk while its sky-blue large eyes stared vaguely out on space.

The Duchess sat impatiently drumming her gloved fingers on the table, until Mrs. Hambly paused for want of breath rather than lack of subject. Then she said:

"I have arranged that the mother should see the child once more, and once more only. An intimation, with an order to visit her in prison, will be sent to you, on the next visiting day, a month hence. I shall order some nice baby things and have them sent on to you. Then you can take him down so that she may bid him farewell."

Something in the tones of the Duchess dried the tears that were flowing so freely, and arrested the harangue that was about to burst from Mrs. Hambly. "Whoever this lady is," thought the good woman, "she's a 'ardened one, as nothing I can say will melt."

"Very well, ma'am, I will obey your horders," she said meekly, wiping her eyes with a corner of her apron.

"You may write, if you like, to the mother, and assure her that the child is well and thriving."

"Please, ma'am, that's more nor I can do. School Boards wasn't invented in my young days."

"My solicitor will write for you in that case. He will call upon you and arrange with you to-morrow most likely."

She rose as she spoke and took out her pocket-case

"Won't you kiss the purty dear, ma'am?"

"No! I am not used to babies, but there is a little present for him, and also something for you."

She placed two crisp twenty-pound bank notes on the table.

"May I ask your name, ma'am?"

"There is my card and London address."

"I am sorry, ma'am, but I cannot read any more than I can write. My heducation never got so far."

"Well, I am the Duchess Valerie di Idumea, and my present address for the rest of this week will be the Hotel Cecil. After that I intend going for a long voyage. My solicitor will, however, arrange everything with you."

Mrs. Hambly almost dropped her precious bundle at the unexpected honour vouchsafed to her. She started to her feet horrified that she had dared to sit in such a presence.

"'Eaven help me, ma'am—your Duchess-ship, I mean. I 'opes as 'ow you'll kindly hoverlook my seeming want of respeck?"

"Good-bye, Mrs. Hambly," said Valerie, graciously

bending her head as she passed out smiling, leaving the worthy washerwoman open-mouthed and speechless staring after her.

"Well I never. Who'd 'ave thought it!" said the honest woman to her unconscious charge, as soon as the beautiful and splendid vision had passed out of her sight.

"A real live Duchess taking up Lewis John. Why, your fortune's made, my purty lambkin. I might ha' known though, if I had only thought about it, that she was sommut out of the hordinary. She was so beautiful and so hicy cold and dignified. Of course, a Duchess couldn't be expected to kiss a hordinary baby. These kind ain't used to nussing and cuddling babies. They've got servants to do this duty for 'em. Never mind, my precious, you've got a good friend now, and if she don't look kind she acts all right."

Mrs. Hambly went no more to the wash-tub except to do up her own and Lewis John's linen. With pardonable pride she announced to her customers that she was now bought up by a Duchess.

Being a Duchess, it appeared like blasphemy in Mrs. Hambly's opinion to judge her patroness from the standard of womanhood. Yet she wished that the lady had shewn more interest in her adopted son, and just a little sympathy and pity for his real mother. She grew very melancholy when she thought about that poor mother's terrible fate. The prison was bad enough for one so sensitive and good to endure. But to have to give up and part for ever from her darling boy, Mrs. Hambly could not conceive any doom more severe and heartrending.

"I've heard about them poor prisoners in Siberia

or some such place, where it's always hice and snow. I've heard about the Hamerican slaves, but they're not in it with this trial. Why, I'd sooner go to the gallows right off and be 'anged than do it. How I ham to stand by and watch that parting I don't know, I'm sure. Poor gal, poor hinnocent gal, for I knows you never went and done it. May the Lord 'ave mercy on you, for He's put it heavy on you, and no mistake about it."

Next day her grace's man of business called upon the widow and startled her by the munificence of the terms he proposed. She had never dreamt, even in her most palmy days, of being worth such wages. No more need for cheeseparing and trying to make ends meet. They were overlapping by yards now. She felt herself a lady of means now, all owing to that blessed baby, Lewis John. All these creature comforts made it harder for her to meditate upon the poor prisoner in gaol.

The afternoon following the satisfactory visit of the lawyer, a great pile of packages were delivered at the cottage, addressed to her. When she opened these packages one after the other, her feminine heart danced merrily, until she again thought about that poor prisoner.

The Duchess had purchased for the baby as only a Duchess with an unlimited purse could purchase. The most complete and costly outfit that the West End could furnish came out of those bundles. The finest of cambric and linen. The most delicate of laces and handsome long robes and short dresses, mantles, caps, and the host of baby requirements, which, being only a man, the writer of this history

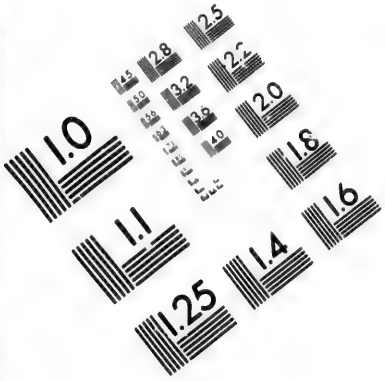
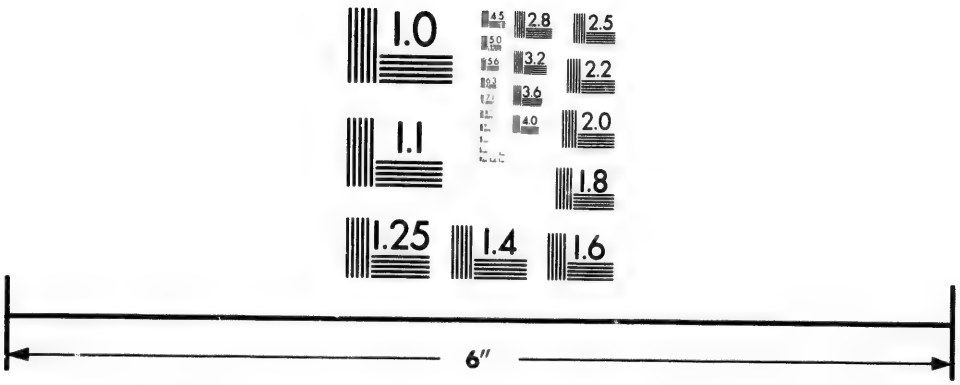
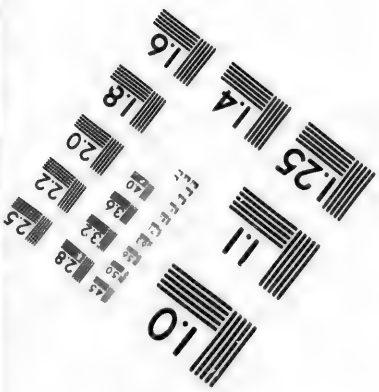
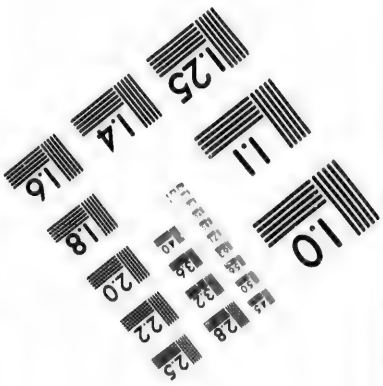


IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (MT-3)







Photographic Sciences Corporation

23 WEST MAIN STREET
WEBSTER, N.Y. 14580
(716) 872-4503

2.8
2.5
3.2
2.2
3.6
2.0
1.8
1.0

cannot describe nor enumerate. It requires the pen of a young lady authoress to do justice to it.

Her grace had done her duty. She had purchased for her adopted son as costly and extravagant an outfit as if he had been her own flesh and blood. Perhaps it was only because she enjoyed the shopping and had no need to deny herself the pleasure of buying. It may have been as a kind of salve to her conscience for having robbed the child of his mother. Perhaps to reconcile this victim to her sacrifice when she next saw her baby so well taken care of. Perhaps for his adored father's sake, for although she hated both child and mother, still that baby was portion of the man whom she worshipped with all the mad passion of her Oriental heart.

Who can tell what blended reasons the Duchess had for her extravagant outlay? Possibly she hoped that the sight of her baby clothed as she could not have clad him would serve as another stab in that already sorely lacerated heart. At any rate, the sight of her child—the last sight which Valerie meant her enemy ever to have—would accentuate the fact of how idle it was for her to struggle against her destiny. Her happiness and her life Valerie now held with an iron grasp.

CHAPTER XX.

THE "GADFLY."

THE steam yacht *Gadfly* was the most perfect and beautiful production that money could purchase or shipbuilding craft turn out.

To term it a yacht, in the strict sense, was decidedly a misnomer. A fairy-like cross between a pleasure steamer, an ocean liner, and a naval gun-boat, more strictly described it. It had all the aft state and luxury of the most up-to-date of ocean liners. All the comforts of those huge floating hotels on a cottage or bungalow scale. A compact and most refined and tasteful floating cottage, as fashionable ladies comprehend cottage life.

Of remarkably light draught considering its size, it was a model of strength, compactness, speed and beauty. The captain and crew were specially picked men of tried abilities and experience. Each sailor on board held a master's certificate, and nearly every man also was qualified to act as pilot in different parts of the navigable world. The Duchess Valeric gave captain's wages to her ordinary seamen, and insisted on having none but experienced skippers to serve her.

It had not been difficult either for her to secure this crew of young, select and certificated men. In every vessel that sails out of the ports there are in the forecastle captains and mates forced to accept the

duties and wages of A.B.'s. These men have all the experience, all the training, all the knowledge, and all the talents required to manage a ship and control a crew. One thing only they lack, and that is influence. Therefore, they are forced to knuckle down and often take their orders from a callow but hopeful young fellow who only knows as yet enough to have scrambled through his examination. The experienced sailor and the experienced soldier without *influence* learn to accept the positions which destiny assigns to them, as do many other men in other professions learn to obey their young and unsophisticated masters.

Socrates dearly loved his jest, yet, being a poor man all his life, he learnt to wrap it—the joke—within many folds of flossy silk. He loved his young masters of Athens also, who praised the floss wrappings round his hidden jest; who answered his modest questions without suspicion. Ah! Socrates was a true philosopher. He apologised to everyone he had offended, until, sick of Xantippe, sick of Athens, and *life* in general, he refused to apologise to the gods. Therefore, he took the hemlock and delivered himself of a few free sentiments before he passed on to the Unknown. As the sage Socrates did, so do men, when they can no longer endure their insolent masters.

The Duchess Valerie, in choosing the crew of her steamship *Gadfly*, did not study influence. With her astute business acumen, she made three conditions only. That their record should be a good one; that their certificates were *bonâ-fide;* and that they could produce evidence of their experience and proficiency in home and foreign waters.

She required practical not gaseous seamen. She wanted also men whom she could herself trust and place confidence in.

Her heart and fancy were centred on one man only, therefore, she did not pick the most attractive applicants who had passed before her. In this she did not act according to her sex's usual custom ; but then she owned a valuable vessel, and was besides a half-daughter of Israel. The Duchess Valerie conducted her own business on such occasions, and carefully examined each applicant. If the credentials satisfied her, she deputed her private detective to discover all about his proclivities and antecedents. To the officers she had chosen she left the duty of finding out whether the applicant could substantiate his credentials. Acting on these principles, she had secured perhaps the bravest and finest body of men, from the ordinary seaman up to the skipper, from the stoker up to the chief engineer, that it was possible for any ship to carry. The *Gadfly* had cost her a fortune to fit up, but at Cowes and elsewhere it was a thing of pride and joy to the ocean initiated. The crew also were *sans reproche*, and the fair owner did not cavil about their price.

The skipper and officers would not have exchanged their berths for any other craft that floated. In the *Gadfly* they had something to officer which drew their hearts out. The crew might have desired to command the *Gadfly*, but they would rather serve in her than command a less perfect craft.

The Duchess Valerie, as she selected her subordinates, also chose, with the same wise foresight, her guests.

Her cousin, Eric St. Arnoul, she had pardoned for his former shortcomings, and as he was her closest kin, she invited him first to join her in her expedition. To please him and make the time pass pleasantly she selected acquaintances who were either distinguished for their social qualities or for their exploits in the fields of war, adventure and sport. They were going to regions where steady nerves and cheerful dispositions were likely to be of more service than pedigree.

It is needless to describe in detail the passengers of the *Gadfly* when she left England. Suffice it say that both lady and gentlemen adventurers were eminently well-bred and agreeable people, also that they all felt delighted at the privilege which had been proffered to them.

They were going on a most delightful voyage, with no settled programme. Their hostess was the most charming and lavish of entertainers. All their desires and ideas of comfort would be gratified on board that magical craft, and at the end of this delicious trip each had the prospect of making their fortune on the gold-fields.

Those that were invited congratulated themselves on their good fortune. A twelvemonth's freedom from duns and other harassing worries; the best of wines, cigars and cooking; almost absolute freedom of action, and a renewed lease of life. The people who were not invited wished that they had been more friendly with Captain Eric St. Arnoul, impecunious blackleg although he was. As they idly wished this, they cursed their own want of foresight. "Politeness where Eric St. Arnoul is concerned cannot be said to cost nothing, yet we might have managed him with a

few pounds and been in this also." Most of the society spectators thought this as they gathered to that farewell champagne luncheon at Cowes, and afterwards waved their hats and handkerchiefs from the tender.

The Duchess Valerie, knowing the censorious world, never placed herself in any ambiguous positions. When she was talked about in society it was in terms of praise and admiration. She studied all the social convenances very closely, and verily she had her reward. She was respected, not alone for her wealth and position, but also for her decorous behaviour. Wherever she was located she patronised the recognised church, and gave largely to charities—*i.e.*, public charities. Thus she was considered to be a perfectly safe companion for the most strait-laced and conservative. She was received without demur into the innermost circle, and considered *crême de la crême* amongst the different circles and skimmings that take place on the top of the milk pail.

Her City speculating proclivities were not, of course, considered at all derogatory to her dignity. In fact, she was all the more petted and courted by her own kind for dabbling in these matters. Dowagers and noble patricians, also venerable dignitaries, courted her assiduously for *tips* about the market; in fact, her outer apartments, while she had been at the Hotel Cecil, had been as much thronged by society grandees as if they had been the ante-rooms of some great Court. Since the Colonial Premiers had occupied this luxurious and palatial Hotel, never had been seen such an eager crowd, or so many emblazoned carriages in its courtyard. For this present outing she had man-

aged to secure the presence of one of the most highly-respected bishops, and a brace of Court dowagers whose reputation alone would have sanctified any collection of Yahoos.

The bishop, like the pair of dowagers, had been ordered to lay in large supplies of ozone to recruit him after the influenza. They were not at all sorry to be able to obey their physician at the expense of her grace.

The other guests, before being invited, had been privately left to the selection of these watch-dogs of society. A large list had been given to their inspection, with the numbers stated that the young Duchess required for the party. In this way Valerie won their sanction and approval by placing herself and her guests under their protection. At the same time, as she had made out the list herself, she succeeded in getting together the most select and agreeable people she knew.

There was nothing omitted to make them all comfortable and happy. There wasn't a detrimental amongst them. The single people had been chosen with a discriminating eye towards future possibilities. Anxious mothers at home sighed with satisfaction now, to think that their dear girls were removed from temptation for so long a time. They could take their ease as they thought that their darlings were in such eligible company and under such experienced care. The married people, also, were not likely to cause any disagreeable scenes, as married pairs are sometimes likely to do when forced to endure each other's society. The Duchess and her able advisers had prevented all this by only inviting those wives whose

husbands were in other parts of the world hunting, soldiering, or engaged in diplomatic pursuits, and those husbands who could not possibly bring their better halves. By this system complete harmony was assured, and a very pleasant prospect was before them all. This is how society manages to prevent those vulgar and sordid domestic scenes which so often spoil proletarian pleasure parties. Unlike Noah's ark, the *Gadfly* did not carry pairs. It carried odd sets of those that Hymen had already paired.

They were all polite and attentive to each other. The wedded people, possibly the most supremely, satisfied that they had left their responsibilities and troubles behind them; the single as yet undecided whether they were likely to be happy or wretched about the arrangements made on their behalf. But a long voyage was before them, and propinquity was likely to smooth over all the present rough edges. If some thought that they had left their aristocratic hearts behind them in ineligible hands, if at present they were disposed to sulk against the obvious intentions of those stately high-priestesses of Hymen's temple, they would not be likely to kick very long against their destinies.

Thus they started their journey under the care of the most dignified of spiritual and social protectors, with the most talented of *chefs* and doctors to attend to their material wants, and a ship the acme of splendour, comfort, and safety.

It was a cunningly-contrived ship in respect to economy of space. Although the cabins were necessarily small, each was so arranged as to be transformed into sitting, bed, or dressing room at the will of

the inmates. By touching certain knobs beds disappeared and satin-covered couches occupied their place, with all the dainty *bric-à-brac* of a lady's boudoir. On the gentlemen's side of the ship the same contrivances changed their berths into cosy bachelor dens, where they were able to enjoy as much privacy as they cared for. Knobs of electric buttons were placed in each cabin, with small labels above each button stating what it was to be pressed for. A touch, and the article required instantly appeared on its own neatly-arranged buffet. By these arrangements the duties of the stewards and stewardesses were considerably lightened. These attendants also were marvels in their lines of duty, for each was either a well-trained and long-tried ladies'-maid or valet, and all models of discretion. Electric globes in the form of flowers and other artistic designs, brilliantly lighted up the ship, producing an effect entrancing in its loveliness.

The saloon was a dream of splendour, and like the private cabins, could be changed into either a dining or a drawing-room almost with the quickness of a transformation scene. Then the morocco-covered chairs were replaced by exquisite satin and silk-covered lounges, ottomans and chairs, while the larger dining tables disappeared and card and other tables took their places.

Marble baths were supplied with hot and cold water and aromatic perfumes. The smoke-room could be used as a billiard-room as well, while the promenade-decks had silken awnings over them and palms set in pots, that made them like a conservatory.

Forty guests could be accommodated without crush-

ing, but the Duchess had limited her guests to twenty, thus giving each of them a spare cabin to use as a store-room or wardrobe. The quarters, also, for the officers and sailors and firemen were as comfortable and commodious as they could be.

The captain was an ex-naval commander. His officers also had been in the naval service, so that they knew, not only how to manage a ship, but how to look after the guns. There were three of these, one of long range and two Gatlings.

The *Gadfly* was thus prepared to sting as well as to skim along the ocean, if stinging was required.

CHAPTER XXI.

VICTIMS OF FASHION.

THIS pretty winged *Gadfly* had already flown over waters where Maxims and Gatlings and long-range guns were not allowed to lie idly under their waterproofs. In spite of our vaunted nineteenth century security on the waterways of the world, there are portions where the pirate and the cut-throat still flourish —demons much more remorseless and cruel than those that infested the Spanish Main.

But the Duchess Valerie was not at all afraid. Her dainty pleasure ship could be turned into a veritable gun-boat on the shortest notice. Her gallant crew could rake the enemy fore and aft, while to any small shot or the defective old-fashioned grape guns of the Malay praos or Moorish galleys, the *Gadfly* was bullet-proof.

Time was no great object with them for the present. They had fully three months before the Yukon River would be open, and the steam yacht was able to travel, with the anthracite and smokeless fuel, twenty-three knots per hour easily when put upon her mettle. They were going for a pleasure trip, however, not a chase; therefore, they used their ordinary coal, and called for fresh supplies at every available port, reserving their special coal for emergencies.

Two weeks after the *Gadfly* left Cowes, Mr. Stephen

Belwood despatched a serviceable ocean tramp in the same direction. The tramp was laden with plant, and carried miners engaged for three years' service, to work the new claim. They were to sail round America and wait for the *Gadfly* at the mouth of the Yukon River, in order to let the steam yacht go in first. The private arrangements of the Duchess and the company promoters made this necessary.

Having, therefore, plenty of leisure on their hands, Commander Osborn steered straight towards Lisbon as his first coaling station. Down the Channel and through the Bay of Biscay—ah! that tempest-tossed Bay of Biscay. The *Gadfly* was beautifully adapted to pass over two waves at a time, but the waves of Biscay defy even the best-laid schemes of shipbuilders.

Here the company did penance for their gastronomic sins, past and present. The anthracite coal was piled on the furnaces, and the *Gadfly* darted through the seething green waves at her swiftest; yet there were many miserable souls on board during that two days' passage. Beds were more in demand, with basins, than baths and boudoirs. At this portion of the voyage his lordship the right reverend Bishop and the two eagle-nosed dowagers had grave doubts as to their physician's goodwill towards them. While they lay groaning in their cabins in their dire extremity they were inclined to entertain suspicions as to the integrity of this fashionable physician, who pocketed his guineas so freely. Supposing, after all, he was a secret emissary of that dreadful Radical, John Burns, and meant to assassinate the upper classes under the pretence that they required ozone?

They had the ozone with a vengeance now, but as

it was now administered, dynamite could not have been much worse.

"I have my suspicions of Sir Harold Goutsettler," murmured his reverend lordship wearily, as he raised himself from the basin which the respectful steward had held his head over. "He has been raised from the lower ranks, and doubtless retains some sympathy still with those dangerous principles of the masses from which he sprang."

The good Bishop was as unjust to the fashionable physician in his dire agony as Hope Eastlake had been to the rector. This physician, even if he had risen from the masses, had as little sympathy with them as his most reverend lordship had.

When, however, the *Gadfly* hove in sight of the Spanish coasts, the weather swiftly cleared and the waves became beautifully less. Then the Bishop and the stately dowagers began to take a more reasonable view of affairs mundane, and even interest themselves so far as to come up on deck and take a good quaff of the ozone recommended. They all felt better after this, and began to take an active interest in the unfolding scenery and the bill of fare for luncheon.

It had not been a long purgatory for the paradise which they were now enjoying. Three days since they had shivered before a marrow-piercing north-east wind, which not all their wrappings could shut out. Now they were gliding over dark-blue waters, where the small waves tossed snowy crests into the warm sunshine.

It was almost pleasure enough to lie back on those comfortable deck chairs and watch those wavelets through the netting; every moment brought an alter-

ation and variety of lighting and colour. Emerald green, amethyst, violet and sapphire-like blue danced over the ocean as the sunlight shifted and raced. Away in the distance stole out cape after cape of the tawny coasts of Portugal, the softest and tenderest of mists films towards the horizon, bluffing out bolder and more definite in colour as the yacht neared them; until what had been a soft wash became rugged cliffs all red and yellow in the lights, and royal purple in the shadows.

Spring costumes took the place of winter furs, these to be swiftly succeeded by summer gauziness. To those gay butterflies of fashion these rapid changes were delightful. These gave them the occupation to which they were accustomed, and without which occupation life would be so void and dreary.

They disappeared at regular intervals into their cabins as actors and actresses do behind the wings; to reappear exhibiting fresh marvels of the sartorial craft. Like birds of gayest plumage, they promenaded the deck, spreading abroad the supposed spices of Araby. They completely altered the original briny flavour of the ozone, so that it wafted over their cheeks and into the nostrils of the seamen charged with violet, cherry blossom, and a thousand delicate and subtle essences of flowers, making them dream of heaven.

The good Bishop, accustomed wherever he went to those celestial odours, was obstinate in his opinion regarding the aroma of ozone. A slight—very slight—bouquet of salt might be discernible at times, through the more exquisite blendings; but he was positive that the ocean air was impregnated with the same

qualities as that which wafted in early summer over gardens and lawns.

It was the one serious and imperative business of these voyagers' lives afloat or on shore to dress themselves, or, rather, have themselves dressed. Vanity had but little to do with it. Modesty nothing. Fashion had fixed laws which dominated every other consideration.

The ladies dressed for the promenade between their bedrooms and the bath in charming *deshabille.* They dressed for breakfast in chaste and simply cut garbs and shades. As the hours advanced towards dinner-time, so they became more extravagant and butterfly-like; sta ting with linen, muslins and softly-clinging materials, to close the exhibition with silks and satins and other rare stuffs.

In the morning they covered their necks and arms with jealous decorum. For luncheon they permitted the gentlemen and seamen to observe slightly-veiled glimpses of those charms, so as gradually to accustom them to the evening exhibition. At dinner, and afterwards, they flung shyness to the perfume-charged ocean breezes and appeared in all their bravery of innocence. The transformation scene was on then. The gentlemen could see for themselves then whether their friends had been good judges of the feminine form divine when they bestowed their names upon those sirens. The young men could examine the wares that were offered for their inspection; while the honest tars, as they looked, then turned their eyes away bashful, thought about the wives, sweethearts and sisters they had left at home.

It was a fair and dazzling picture when the electric

globes were glowing. A generous and lavish display of rich and artful robes, with flashing jewellery, resting upon shimmery tresses and creamy arms and necks. They were all beautiful at such times; even the dowagers contrived to do with Time what Canute could not do with the waves.

But in spite of the rare vintages, the epicurean dishes, the splendid surroundings and the rapid changes, it was all slightly monotonous. They had done this sort of thing all their lives, until it had become to the actors like one of those long run and successful plays. They played at dressing, eating, drinking and flirting. They all did a little sketching. They were all accomplished; therefore spared each other as much as possible the infliction of those accomplishments. When they played or sang, they performed because they were asked to do so, yet without expecting anyone to listen. This helped to kill the hours.

They were votaries of pleasure who had mostly lost all zest for the pleasures of life. The conversations, brilliant although they were, sometimes, and refined also in their heartlessness and cynicism, were the same in that ocean saloon as took place in the drawing-rooms on shore. The softly-whispered words that they listened to on the deck, under those glorious stars, were repetitions of those insidious whisperings they had listened to in shady conservatories and on river boats so often.

There was the same well-groomed uniformity amongst the men. If some were vicious they covered their criminal instincts by the same monotonous softness and politeness and lack of individuality. They

all wore moustaches varying only in shade, like the colour of their morning tweeds or flannels. In the evening, however, one man might easily take the place of another without the change being observed.

And the young maidens were not much more interested than were the matrons about what was whispered to them under the stars.

They had their passions, doubtless, as their hostess had, yet none of them possessed her vitality or intensity. Amongst that bevy of fair, smiling and gracious women, and their attending and courteous flatterers, it is doubtful if one heart had the capability of being lit as hers was. They might be warmed, or even made red-hot by outside flame, but they were not combustible, and they cooled quickly.

His lordship the Bishop, when he promenaded the deck with the lynx-eyed dowagers, suffered no uneasiness at what he heard or saw. His present charges had all been well trained. They would never do anything foolish or sinful. They were not impulsive, so he enjoyed himself greatly, and gradually got rid of his rheumatic and influenzic pains.

The Duchess Valerie was not at all *ennuyé*, if most of her guests were. She adored the ocean, and gloated on the ardent sunshine. Her love for Sir Lewis Eastlake, evil although it was, engrossed her active mind too utterly and constantly for her to be listless. She was impatient, and wished that her wealth and fire could have thawed the ice that now separated her from the land she longed to reach. But, since that was impossible, she had the rare gift of being able to wait and enjoy what was given to her. She drank deep draughts of the fresh ocean air. She

basked in the sun-heat with all the pleasure that a cat takes in a winter fire. She flattered the good bishop and the dowagers, and divided her attentions so equally amongst her guests that no one could be jealous.

Sometimes she would lend her small ears to a little flattery and honeyed words. But before the flatterer had time to flatter himself that he had made an impression, her grace would turn him off with a merry jest, or sly shaft of good-tempered sarcasm. She was an adept in the wiles of the sportsmen, and not to be caught. Her male visitors knew her of old. As Sir Lewis had done, they considered her beyond their reach. The Duchess Valerie was a prude who would never commit an indiscretion or risk her place in society, and she had the ambitious pride of Queen Bess. She would reign alone unless she could conquer another kingdom with her next consort.

Meantime the *Gadfly* glided on her journey with all the smoothness of a swallow on the wing. They put into Lisbon for two or three days, as the Duchess had a large wine-growing estate here and a comfortable château on one of the sunny hills of this pleasant city.

They all enjoyed the change ashore, and were soon in the everlasting swim of fashion, which is so extremely hard to enter and so difficult to keep out of, unless the votary drops out of sight altogether.

They drove through the Do Chiado, the Plaçe du Commerce, and di Figuiera. They sauntered through the sheltered Avenue of Salitre, visited the numerous churches and convents as well as the opera house; bought trinkets and jewellery from the goldsmiths, and did all that the Grandees expected them to do.

Then, satiated and fagged out with balls, receptions, and the everlasting tear and wear of their lives, they crept once more back to the comparative ease and seclusion of the *Gadfly*.

To Madeira they next steamed, and were almost rested when they anchored once again in the harbour of Funchal, to be met by a host of aristocratic invalids. They were boarded by those wearied valetudinarians, and carried ashore to the fashionable hotel, where once again the same round took place. There could be no escape, this side of civilisation, for those tired-out victims of fashion.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CYCLONE.

IT is needless to say that on this ocean voyage a considerable amount of money—or its equivalents, I O U's—changed hands. Without the excitement of gambling, the world clept society would be a dreary void.

What are fine attire and ornaments to those who have profusions of them?

When the bumpkin gives to his sweetheart a ribbon or a pair of plated ear-rings, he walks straight into her innermost heart, for he maketh it rejoice, and when the heart is merry it lowers its drawbridge and flings open its gates.

But the patrician lover may involve himself with the Jews until he is over the ears, purchasing diamonds and other precious stones for his love, without stirring her sluggish pulse, more than just one momentary throb, if that. It is vulgar to be emotional. If his love cares for him in the patrician sense of the word love, all the gifts which Solomon bestowed upon Sheba would not one whit advance his cause. He must have the rent-roll, or the title, to make him move this well-tutored maiden. His gifts are only drops put into a full bucket. They may be pretty drops, and they are taken into the bucket, because it would be rudeness to refuse that which may impart pleasure to the giver.

What are rare dishes and costly wines to those who every day fare upon them? The coster takes his Donah to the gallery of the theatre. After giving her that mental food they go to a fried fish and eel-soup establishment. If he has cash enough he will treat her to eel-soup, fried fish and potatoes, washing these delicacies down with a pot of "four" between them. He is a man in his own and in his Donah's estimation, for this generosity. She dwells tenderly upon those evenings for years after she has buckled into the cares of life. They are the sweet flowers of love and romance to her, the poetic reminiscences of her and his past; the blossoms which love sent out in that spring-time before the frost.

Can any fashionable young lover ever be so fatuous as to dream that his love has paid the slightest attention to the viands which helped to empty his purse, on the rare occasions that he could act the host? If they have to part, and she has to take the other fellow, it may be a certain flower that stood between them which she may remember—for a time; never what she ate or drank.

The Donah remembers for years the drama or the songs that were sung at the music-hall, while she was with her coster boy. The patrician has heard and seen too much to recollect even what particular opera it was, during which *he* came in to say farewell.

But they are not quite *blasé* and emotionless, these aristocrats. They do have their moments of interests and excitements during which a strong pulse of human nature thrills through them.

Wines nor spirits cannot do this, for they have supped these nectars from their boy and girlhood.

The passion of war rouses them up a little, particularly when they are hedged in by the enemy and all hope seems dead.

Then the ancient instinct for fighting will grip at their languid hearts—the lust of murder, if you will—and they become rejuvenated. The savage man springs up and fills them with a strong and steadfast joy. Death sends into their nostrils his acrid breath, and they fight—fight and joy in the slaying and being slain. Next to this appetite, which makes heroes of our soldiers and fills our prisons with lower-bred criminals, comes the instinct and lust for loot. Gambling administers to, and satisfies, that passion.

The excitement of the turf. From the start to the finish of a race an eternity of fierce excitement holds the man who has a stake on the result. He lives, during those few moments, a hundred weeks of his ordinary existence.

On the tables at Monte Carlo, as he pitches his patrimony on the colour he patronises, he is a bunch of nervous expectation, which to him seems more like pleasure than anything he has been used to.

In the City, with shares and stocks fluctuating, he lives with the same intensity that he does at the roulette circle, the race-course and the card-table.

That is why, now that gambling in its most exciting forms is prohibited, these descendants of the roll-signers of Battle Abbey are rushing pell mell into the Stock Exchange. They absolutely require some excitement in order to exist.

Captain Eric St. Arnoul was not a popular member of his London clubs, or rather, he had not been before his cousin, the Duchess, had introduced him to some

good Stock Exchange investments and advanced him the money to invest. Now, however, his name was flourishing in the public papers, as director of several sound companies, and his most pressing debts all paid. Then the dowagers and the bishops had absolved him and condoned his shady past. He was a respectable scion of the aristocracy once more.

Her Grace had advised him to be most careful in his handling of the cards and cues. He was at present on his promotion with a future before him, if he could only act on the square.

He was, therefore, extremely cautious in his behaviour, and as far as he could, he acted fairly. If, therefore, owing to his extraordinary skill, a good many I O U's fell to his share during this voyage, he could not help that. It was out of his power to forego a game, but no man could *now* accuse him of pricking the cards. He had eschewed that kind of artistic work after the Calydon affair, in which his friend, Sir Lewis, had been kicked out, and he had only escaped by the skin of his teeth.

The Bishop was fond of a quiet rubber. So were the dowagers, but as they only played for shilling points there was no possible excitement to be got out of them. He took a hand, however, when wanted with them, in order to please her Grace, but while sometimes he won, more often he lost to these ancients. So close a shave, however, did he run them, whether winning or losing, that both Bishop and dowagers declared him to be a most excellent young man. It was when my lord the Bishop and the dowagers had retired to their virtuous couches that the real games commenced. Then the play ran lofty

and Eric St. Arnoul fought as his ancestors had done at Hastings. He spared not, yet he played with a pure and open hand.

It is hard to overcome the habits of early youth. Often when Eric was trying to bluff his antagonist, how he wished that he had that quaint little steel cockspur still in his vest pocket. Alas! he had left it behind.

It is so hard to have to depend upon chance when one might be sure. Yet there was his position in the City to keep up, and her Grace, his cousin, had a remarkably sharp pair of eyes.

He lost sometimes, but he won often, and, by his adroit management, kept himself popular with his cousin's guests. They all liked a clever player to tackle, and besides, they were going out to a land where they would be sure of a new excitement—that of gold mining. Gold, which fascinates the humble clerk, held this aristocratic throng in thrall. They had all brought money to purchase shares or claims in the Yukon. They were all as keen upon it as the humblest digger who had shipped for wages with the Yukon Moose Mining and Exploration Company on the ocean tramp that followed them from England.

After enjoying the delicious climate of Madeira, and going over its spots of interest, riding or being carried in hammocks up the precipitous roads, and down into its deep green and flower-covered valleys, our voyagers next hied them to the Canaries. They paused for a day at Palmas, then once more they steamed away due west towards those fertile islands of the Spanish Main.

The lofty peak of Teneriffe loomed up behind them,

for the greater portion of that first day, a marked object on the horizon. Then it faded and sank gradually, and they had an unbroken circle of sea and sky.

It must have been a fearsome responsibility to cross this ocean when Columbus made that first journey of his. He believed, as the sincere advocate of immortality does, that there was land beyond that sky-line, and he sailed full of faith. But what anxious nights and days he must have endured, despite his faith, as the vessel plunged towards that Unknown, over those laughing blue waves! How he must have watched the log-line when it was cast over the side to know if it drifted behind, or went with them, side by side. Each hour his men must have watched also, with beast-like terror in their eyes—the kind of terror that makes beasts grow vicious and men become murderers.

As the line floated behind, Captain Christopher was able to breathe with relief; he had gained another hour of respite from death. His faith was not *yet* proved a myth and a fallacy. There was no deadly current swaying them in its relentless grip and sucking them on to that fathomless abyss—the end of the earth—or if there was such a fate in store for them, they were *not yet* within the awful influence.

"It took some pluck in our forefathers to venture outside the circumscribed lines of their time, my lord," observed Eric St. Arnoul to the Bishop, as he aired his book-reading to his erudite companion. They were both sitting under the silken awning one forenoon, with a sun beating down upon the deck which made it decidedly warm where exposed, although the pitch had not yet commenced to rise out of the seams. It was

warm, but not oppressive, and the Bishop was in a genial temper. The uric acid had been subdued for the time, at least the pains had quitted his joints. He was therefore in his most tolerant mood and answered genially: "They were terrible bigots, in those dark ages, and—well, yes, you are quite correct, captain. It did require some pluck for such adventurers as Christopher Columbus to discover America, in the days during which he lived."

His lordship had won two games of cribbage from this interesting young man, who could play so well; yet not quite well enough to beat the Bishop, on the night before. The air was balmy, although each instant becoming more sultry.

"I have not felt so well for several years," remarked his lordship, daringly cracking his finger joints. "I believe I am growing younger every hour."

At this moment a sailor approached and said:

"Beg pardon, sirs, but you had better go below—we are in for a buster."

"A what?" asked the Bishop, vaguely.

"A cyclone—get below as quick as you can—for by George it will be on us in another minute or two."

The seaman rushed from the promenade deck, as if he had been a New York fireman shewing off his paces to the expectant crowd. As he did so the boatswain's whistle sounded shrilly.

"A rude fellow that, don't you think so, Captain St. Arnoul?" asked the Bishop, turning to his young companion.

But Eric had risen with alacrity, and without commenting on the man's behaviour, dragged the Bishop out of his chair.

"For God's sake, quick, your lordship! Let me help you down to your cabin, or you may be washed overboard."

His right reverend lordship had been airily cracking his finger joints a few minutes since; his knee joints cracked now, with the strain he put upon them as he raced along the deck towards the companion way, Eric dragging and urging him along.

They were in time, but only just in time, to reach the saloon before the Bahama buster pitched upon them with its usual vehemence and speed.

Fortunately for the rest of the voyagers, it came while they were attiring for luncheon. The sailors had time to secure the openings and batten the doors.

With a devilish shriek the tornado swept upon them without warning to the uninitiated. Into the smiling blue sky it sprang with the bound and ferocity of an enraged tiger. It trailed in its rear slate-tinted clouds and seething white waves. It laid hold of the silken awning and tore it into ribbons in one instant of time. It bent the masts like willow branches before an autumn wind. It covered the vessel three-quarters up her funnel with snowy spume, and tossed the dignified Church magnate, as if he had been a shuttlecock, from one end of the saloon to the other.

A terrible moment that was to everyone on board while this sixty or a hundred-mile-per-hour wind-fiend rushed past. The agitated ocean came after this resistless gust, and rose up to quash all resisting obstacles as it rushed seethingly along in the wake of the cyclone.

But the *Gadfly* had been built to face such rough emergencies; so after a duck and a stagger she righted

and began also to race as the waves were racing, furiously and madly.

There was consternation below during this wild half-hour of savage turmoil. Women shrieked and clung to whatever looked firm. Men set their teeth and clutched on also to rails and door handles. Heavy feet tramped overhead and hoarse voices roared through speaking-trumpets, while the wind screamed shrilly and the waves rushed over and obscured the daylight in the skylights and portholes.

Then gradually peace settled down, and the propellers began to work and gently thud as they had done before. The crisis was over, and they could begin to pick up their toilet apparatus, and set once again to the task of making themselves beautiful.

The Bishop picked up his episcopal frame, with the aid of his young friend St. Arnoul, with whom he had been playing skittles for the last half-hour. They both instinctively sought the electric buttons marked "brandy and soda," and pressed them fervently. Then braced up, they began to consider where they were.

"I fancy we must be nearing the Spanish Main now," observed Eric cheerfully. "This seems like Captains Kidd and Morgan's weather doesn't it, my lord?"

"It is ruthless enough for any piratical company," answered his lordship with a ghastly grin, as he poured out a second bumper and quaffed it off. "I suppose this is what Americans term mild and peaceful."

CHAPTER XXIII.

GOLD DUST AND NUGGETS.

As spring advanced, the fortunate representatives of the Moose Mining Company found game becoming exceedingly plentiful. Herds of reindeer and musk oxen were to be seen quite close to the camp almost every day. Arctic hares and ptarmigans were in abundance, while the white foxes and wolves prowled about through the lichen-draped woods.

The landscape around them was strangely fascinating in its grandeur and solitude. Still covered with about four feet of powdery snow and ice-locked, there were not wanting signs that summer was approaching —those droves of wild game gradually migrating northward, the longer hours of daylight, and the sprouting of green needles on the snow-laden pines.

Amongst the ranges that surrounded them in all directions could be heard at nights, and during the early morning, the breaking of ice walls and ridges. These, with their avalanches of snow, thundered down into the deep cañons and valleys with all the din of a battery of great guns being fired. The keen, pure atmosphere re-echoed those mighty thunderings vast distances. Indeed, a shout or the report of a rifle could be heard for miles.

To inhale that bracing atmosphere also was delightful. Its purity penetrated the lungs and brain with a

kind of intoxication—the intoxication which robust and perfect health fills a man with. It was impossible to feel sluggish or low-spirited in this region. The inside organs worked actively and in perfect order, forcing the muscles to constant exertion.

The depressing night was passing away, and now that the sun began to rise over the mountain peaks, every day made an alteration in the vegetation. Heavy-laden branches flung off their white burden and lifted themselves up to greet that long-absent sun. Where the game had scraped away the snow, patches of vivid moss began to spread amongst the lichen. Very soon the valley would be a paradise of wild flowers—gentians, asters, violets, blue-bells, buttercups, forget-me-nots and lupins in great beds.

The site which they had fixed upon was sheltered, to a great extent, from the fierce Arctic winds. They were in the bed of a valley, with rugged cliffs walling them in. These cliffs were not at all difficult to climb, for they were broken up by numerous fissures, boulders and ledges, and rendered picturesque by the dwarf trees which clung to and grew amongst them.

Beyond these nearer ranges, the mountain scenery became wilder and more difficult of ascent ; yet there were many tablelands, plentifully wooded, with lakes within them filled with fish. These lakes and tarns were supplied by tumultuous torrents that would soon be thawed, and once again sent foaming and roaring within their rugged channels.

Further off rose the icy glaciers that never melted, or only on their lower edges, near the morasses. These glowed with prismatic hues in the rays of the rising and setting sun—majestic and fantastic peaks, that were

most beautiful always as they towered above the lower world. It was a land of mountains and valleys, of wild torrents and waterfalls, of rushing streams and deep translucent lakes, of wild gorges where darkness and terror reigned, the home of the grizzly and brown bears.

There was no scarcity of wood and shrubs of the hardy order. Dwarf birches and willows throve round the margins of those tarns and torrents. Carp, trout, grayling and pike abounded; also in the lower streams and rivers was a constant supply of salmon. It was only during the dreary night of winter that these were at all difficult to get at, by reason of the ice which locked them in.

In the valley, where the gold-finders were located, a wide and boulder-filled stream passed through, fed by hundreds of smaller torrents. Here, when the ice had melted, the crystal water foamed and dashed over or round the obstructing masses of rock until it finally poured into a larger and deeper river.

It was only one of countless tributaries with which the country was drained, and which seemed to remind Scotchmen and Welshmen of their native land. Here, however, Nature was on a larger and grander scale.

There were discomforts, certainly, to those who had come without properly providing themselves. That past winter had been a terrible ordeal to pass through to Sir Lewis Eastlake and his mate Jack Wade. They had worked up to the last moment the previous summer at this prospecting, without considering what was before them, otherwise they need not have suffered.

The game had been there as well as the gold, but they had devoted themselves to the gold, and rashly

spared the game ; consequently, when the long night fell upon them, they found their bags filled with gold dust, and their larder well nigh empty.

Fuel of course they had, for the valley was covered with trees and shrubs. The fir and pine were easily ignited and kept their hut warm enough. Water they could get also, by melting the snow, but unless they found leisure to hunt, lo ! the land was desolate. Thus they had been reduced to pretty dire extremities before they were discovered and rescued by Bill Sykes and his company.

It was not in human nature for them to leave this golden valley without a struggle, even although they had secured what they believed were the richest portions of it. It made them sad to think that they could not peg it all in, and that they were forced to leave so much for others to get. They knew that as soon as they had reported this discovery at Dawson City the whole country would be swarming with excited gold-seekers. Huts would rise like magic, and those woods which adorned the landscape would be ugly blanks. The game would disappear like the trees, and instead of a sylvan paradise it would be a bleak pandemonium. But their duty was clear, or rather, consideration for the safety of their own claims. They must get down and secure their rights before they were invaded by strangers. They must show what they had found to the Gold Commissioners and the Mining Recorder, and hand over the commission to the Government.

What a glorious find it had been ! As they measured each claim and drove in their "legal posts," according to regulations, they groaned to think of what they had to leave "unstaked." Day after day passed

before they could tear themselves away from their fascinating valley and those crevices in the rocks where, every now and again, such rich pockets turned up.

A wild fever seized upon the whites and half-breeds that excluded every other consideration. Only the pure-bred Indians kept calm and cool under this good fortune. They knew the value of gold dust also, those Indians, but they did not lose their heads. nor neglect their stomachs, as did others. Neither did they care greatly for the work that was so needful before the gold could be reached. They went out hunting, leaving the others to dig, and after they were fed, they sat smoking calmly and listening phlegmatically to each day's account. They took their share of the dust and were prepared to dispose of their rights as soon as the transfer could be accomplished.

The Canadian Government place no restrictions as to the nationality of those who may become miners. Chinese, Japs, Negroes, Indians, can become free miners so long as they agree to work their claims. In this the Yukon mining regulations differ from those of any other gold field in the world. In Australia. Chinamen are prohibited from competing with miners —in fact they are debarred from all the rights of free men.

Sir Lewis Eastlake, as soon as he was able to handle the pick and shovel, took his share of the work. With the return of health he pushed all other considerations out of his mind except the one excitement—gold. He had no time to brood over his supposed wrongs. When he returned to civilisation he would consider them, and remedy them as far as he could do

Meantime, the one passion held him and kept him from brooding. It was not that he was callous or indifferent to his supposed dishonour. He was not. Deep in his heart a great pain, like a fungus spawn, lay buried, waiting upon the time when he had leisure to think, to sprout out with deadly growth. At present it was like a dormant disease.

When men are in the whirl of gambling or gold-finding no other emotions can touch them. Their dearest and best-loved may die or desert them, their hopes of happiness wither; they have become stoics for the time, and are able to beat down the instincts of Nature as effectually as if they had been drugged with the Indian hasheesh.

It was no wonder that they were all excited and not inclined to leave the place. Already they had washed out over six hundred pounds' weight of gold, and every night were adding to their store, not by ounces but by pounds.

Bill Sykes had seen and heard about many gold-finds down California way, but they were nothing to be compared with this.

It seemed to be scattered all over the land, as if Nature had grown reckless and disdainful of this, the most useless yet most precious of her drosses. There might have been a heavy rain of gold dust in the dim and mystic ages, over which a slight layer of earth, gravel, and moss had gathered, so unfailing it seemed to be.

In the stream they picked out nuggets already washed, lying in the pools and against the sides of rocks, varying from the size of a pea to a hen's egg. On the ledges and amongst the crevices of the hillside

they came upon the same stores. A tug at the overgrowing mosses and lichens, and there the darlings lay inside comfortable nests, like eggs ready for hatching.

On the bank of the stream, and almost at every part where they dug, they had only to get past the upper turf to find the lode. It was tremendous. Each day of work made them richer by thousands. One day they counted out a thousand pounds' worth to each man. On the next it was five hundred each; on the next it was thirteen hundred each; and so on with varying luck, never a day with less results than five hundred each, to float between that and two thousand each.

They were piling it up in such quantities that it ought to have satiated them. They had not reached that stage yet, however. It takes a great quantity of gold dust to surfeit either woman or man, particularly while they are working for it. That is half the pleasure, much more than can be gained by spending what they have accumulated at so much risk to their bodies or their souls.

It was characteristic of human nature that as soon as they were satisfied that the claims they had fixed on were likely to prove the richest, they left them alone. They measured them, after testing, and put up their stakes with the orthodox flatted sides. Then they went fossicking about the other portions of the valley. It was partly to be quite sure that they had made a proper selection, partly to get as much as they could out of the, as yet, unclaimed ground before they tapped their own property.

All this was very human and natural, particularly when the results were so highly satisfactory.

They lingered on, vowing that on the morrow they would go to Dawson City, yet still working as never galley slaves toiled under the lash. On through April, and almost to the middle of May, when the snows were melted and the valley was a mosquito-infested swamp, into which they sank to the knees in slushy mosses as they moved about.

They had stored so much of the precious ore that they were forced to bury two-thirds of it under their cabin. The third, which they were determined to take down as a proof of their discovery, was almost more than they could carry now. The journey was so arduous and the track in such bad condition that the sledges were no longer of use. They would have to walk and bear their precious burden on their backs.

They were three hundred and seventy miles from Dawson City, with numerous treacherous creeks and rivers to ford. Where they had not these streams to cross, they had quagmires in the valleys, and flats to encounter, and stiff mountain ridges to cross.

But they could no longer delay, in spite of the rains and floods. They wanted to get down in time to hire and send up men before the season was too far advanced. Sir Lewis had also to meet the Duchess Valerie, and send the good news home to the company whose agent he was.

One of the half-breeds and two of the Indians were left with Jack Wade to watch over their property.

Then they made up their packages and divided the gold dust into equal parts, and, shouldering their guns and swags, they set off on that long and troublesome journey.

They had only their compass and the Indians to

guide them, for the country had altered its appearance greatly with the change of season. They had to make many detours also when they found portions impassable. In spite of their eagerness and hardy endurance, it took them four weeks to tramp the distance.

A journey to be remembered that was, with its hourly trials, discomforts, and dangers. But they accomplished it at last, and arrived at Dawson City, about as dilapidated as ever tramps or diggers could have been.

As they mounted the last ridge and saw below them this Yukon Valley capital, they opened their eyes with blank amazement at what lay spread out before them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NO. B. 45.

TWO months elapsed before Hope Eastlake, or, as she was termed on her prison card, B. 45, saw her baby.

Those two months the Duchess Valerie and her guests had passed merrily winging from port to port of that romantic country, South America. Those two months to her husband flew quickly past in his gold dust and nugget collecting. No. B. 45 had passed them in the prison hospital.

Nature caved in after that interview between Hope and the Duchess Valerie. Up to then the angel after whom she was called whispered such platitudes to her soul as: "The darkest hour comes before the dawn,"

"Every cloud has its silver lining," "It is a long lane that has no turning," etcetera.

Alas! what kind of dawn could she expect who had abdicated her husband and her child? Only the dawning that comes after death. When the afflicted spirit flies out of its earthly prison, and finds surcease with those tortured souls who have gone before; when God places the seal of forgetfulness upon the racked spirit and bids it remember no more, for memory is Hell and Heaven is surcease.

Ah! she had loved a man with all the faith and devotion of her being, and he had failed her; she had been blessed with the supreme gift of Nature to woman—a child—and now she had to relinquish her treasure in order that it might not suffer for her woeful mistake. She understood now the anguish some mothers endure before they decide that it is best to kill their offspring and themselves, because the world does not consider how great those gifts are which God has bestowed on mothers.

She had been modest and pure-minded all her life, yet she was defamed, and by her own hand; but it was for the sake of *his* baby. What mother would not have made the same sacrifice?

The sordid sin and temptation of paltry theft was something she could not even understand, far less yield to; yet there was her prison card, facing her in her cell and outside the door, announcing her to be a *thief*, and a *number*, instead of a human being.

She did not wake out of that swoon which the Duchess Valerie had cast her into for nearly three weeks. That is, the prison doctor applied restoratives and plunged her into a delirium, during which

her mind was a blank, the same as it had been in the swoon.

They took her to the hospital meantime, and there, in the cot in which they placed her, she spent the time in prattling about the joys of her childhood, about her lover, and about her baby, to cold and hardened ears. Her head was shaved, and when she recovered her senses there were few traces of her former comeliness left, only that pure, sweet profile, which nothing except vice could destroy, and that sensitive mouth.

The prison doctor was not a very sympathetic man; at least, what sympathies he had were greatly warped by his habitual intercourse with criminal patients and malingerers. He did not believe much that he would be likely to meet virtue or innocence inside his wards.

Still he was interested so far in his patient that he advised the authorities to leave No. 45 in the hospital. "She will not be able to do hard labour," he reported. "She has had some kind of mental shock; but she can help in the ward." She was not well enough to see visitors when the first month was ended, so the chance passed, and Mrs. Hambly had to wait for another month.

The mental shock, which the doctor said she was suffering from, mercifully left her mind in a curiously passive condition. Her memory was muddled, and her brain worked sluggishly, while the past seemed like a charcoal sketch half-smeared away.

She could not concentrate her thoughts upon any definite point. When she tried to think about her baby, it seemed as if a mist rose between her and the features she had loved so passionately. When

she tried to recall something, it became mixed with something else. She felt as if she were moving in a dream, with real and shadowy things crossing, blending, and blurring her inward vision.

One morning she heard the song of a thrush, and she thought that must be her baby's voice, but she was not greatly troubled about this; she was not troubled greatly about anything at this period.

She took all for granted with a pathetic resignation; she never revolted against her fate, as most captives do at the first; she blamed no one; she did not reason, but accepted her loss of liberty, her loss of character, and her loss of hope, as the Eastern fatalist does misfortune.

She had a little milder treatment in the hospital wards than she would have had in the cells, and perhaps more liberty.

But she was a prisoner, therefore kept strictly under by the warder nurses. She was made to do the drudgery, the scrubbing and washing, so that her position was not much improved from that of the other prisoners.

Her muteness, obedience, and passive endurance forced at last a kind word now and again from those stern-faced, iron-hearted nurses. They went about their duties with as little interest in their patients as it was possible for humanity to take. These criminals were, on the whole, not interesting patients, except to anthropological students. Prison and asylum nurses are not, as a class, anthropological. They do their work in the true spirit of the time-hired workman.

No. B. 45 was grateful for even the small favour

shewn to her by those mercenaries. She did her best to repay them by taking their places at nights when any of them wanted an extra sleep. She did this without thinking of shirking her daily drudgery, or with any idea of sneaking in with those task-mistresses; simply because she did not feel any need for rest herself. Her mind was sleeping all the time, and her body only working mechanically.

Her world for the present was limited to those white-washed walls and locked, warder-guarded iron doors. She saw the sky through the bars, and birds sometimes flying across.

But no news of the outer world came to her, and the nurses, although they addressed her kindly, held no conversation with her. She was ordered either harshly or pleasantly to do a certain task, and when that was done another task was found for her. She was an ordinary gaol hack, given washing and scrubbing to do instead of picking oakum.

On Sundays she was marched off to church, and placed with her sister convicts. There she felt her degradation the most, when she furtively looked at the horrible faces around her. She trusted that she had not yet come to look like those thieves and murderesses; for although many were youthful, they all bore the same expression, and many of the same characteristics. She was glad that it was only on Sunday and in church that she was forced to mix with such women.

And yet, perhaps, some of them might be innocent of the charges on which they were convicted, as she was. It does not always do to judge from outward appearances. The chaplain, like the doctor, spoke

kindly to her. He took it for granted that she was a thief, since she was there for that crime. While he lectured her kindly about her past wickedness he trusted that she would lead a better life in future. As he told her, she was still young, with a long life before her in which to shew her repentance.

A long life before her! She shivered as she murmured these words, and fervently prayed that this might not be. But she did not contradict the parson, or any longer assert her innocence. Every male and female prisoner did this, she had been told; therefore no one expected her to say anything else.

One favour she would have liked, for she was a devout Churchwoman, but it was denied her, and to all except those belonging to the Roman faith. She would have liked Holy Communion. When she made this request to the chaplain he told her that no persons were permitted to be communicants until they had been, at least, three months in prison. "The reason is obvious," he said majestically; but although she could not grasp this obvious reason, she put this down to her own stupidity, and abjectly apologised for her presumption; she had lost her liberty and all that she cared for on earth; it did not astonish her that she should also be forbidden this spiritual boon. She crept into her cell to pray for strength to bear the sorrows that had been heaped upon her.

She was a harmless and spiritless object, the nurses and warders said, when discussing her amongst themselves. Therefore, while good-naturedly despising her, they trusted her to do many a little task for them which they should have done themselves.

Slowly the second month of her incarceration

passed, and then the day arrived that she was to see her baby.

She had known this for a week before the day came. She also had known that this was to be the farewell between her and baby. She would be permitted to hold him in her arms for the last time, and look into his blue eyes, then she must school herself to see him no more. That had been one of the conditions between her and the Duchess, the future arbitress of the little one's destiny.

She wondered why she did not feel more eager expectancy at this coming visit. Why was it that her heart still felt like lead and that she experienced no fever of unrest during that week of waiting? The hours went by the same as before, and when she tried to be excited she could not rouse her torpid mind.

Even when the moment had come, she felt no emotion except dull despair as she walked quietly through the lobby and into the visitors' room after her warder. Not even when she saw Mrs. Hambly, with her baby, did the thud strike her heart that she had expected.

"Ah, my poor dear, my poor dear, how ill you have been, to be sure," cried Mrs. Hambly, rushing up to her, and placing Lewis John, dressed like a royal Prince, in the mother's arms.

"Do I look bad?" she asked gently, sitting down on the form and holding her baby loosely on her knee. She had not kissed him yet, and he was staring up at her wonderingly, as if she had been a stranger. Then something in her face troubled his infantine mind, for all at once he began to kick against her and bellow for all he was worth.

"Ah, the bad boy, don't he know his own mammy?" cried Mrs. Hambly, shocked at this monstrous ingratitude.

"No; he has forgotten me," cried the poor mother wearily. "Take him for a moment, for—for I think —I shall let him fall."

Her thin arms sank helplessly down, while she drooped against the wall. Mrs. Hambly was only just in time to catch her precious charge, while the warder took hold of No. B. 45 and shook her roughly.

"Come now, none of that, 45, or I'll pack your visitors off. Rouse up, if you want them to stay the half-hour allowed."

The remedy was prison-like, but it was effective; much more so than smelling-salts or burnt feathers would have been

Hope opened her eyes and sprang to her feet with a shrill scream. Her faculties were waking up.

"No, no, please do not send them away. I am better."

The wardress retired to the door with a grunt. She was a woman who had been chosen for her inches. Tall, raw-boned, and as harsh-featured as a Maori fighting man, and with about as much sympathy in her composition as a carved Maori image.

No. B. 45 stood for a moment pressing her forehead with both her work-reddened hands. Her golden-brown hair was just beginning to grow, but it was stubbly and too short yet to curl, although naturally wavy. Her face was thin and almost transparent in its bloodless pallor, white-lipped, and blue veins streaking the fleshless brow, and purple shadows under the pink eyelids. No wonder her baby failed to

recognise her. No wonder that he was afraid of her.

Mrs. Hambly had managed, by this time, to soothe his first paroxysm of howls, but he was still sobbing and wetting his rosy cheeks with a copious flood of

"Now, now, Lewis John, be quiet, my precious pet. There now, my little man. Ain't he grown a beauty, my dear? Just you come over gently and 'ave a look at him. He'll remember you presently, I warrant you."

No. 45 dropped on her knees and crept forward as any devout heathen might have done before her idol. She was beginning to wake up. Her heart was melting, and the frozen anguish surging up to her throat and brain.

"Take off his cap," she whispered huskily. "I want to see him properly."

"Certainly, my dear. But ain't it a purty cap, and jist look at that real lace on his cloak!"

"Take off the cloak also," again whispered the convict mother.

She had no eyes for what delighted the aged woman. She looked at the costly short dress, lace-covered cloak and silk cap with jealous loathing. These trappings were the first-fruits of her sacrifice. They shewed her that her enemy had acted according to the contract. They buried her baby from her hungry eyes. They were the outward and tangible signs of her bereavement.

Carefully Mrs. Hambly removed the cap and cloak, placing them reverently to one side, then triumphantly she exhibited her charge.

"What do you think o' that, for seven months growing? Ain't he a picture of health and beauty?"

The mother's bosom heaved, while her eyes shone like twin stars; then, with open lips, she put out one thin hand and timidly touched the ball of golden fluff.

Hope Eastlake had never seen anything so beautiful, so worthy of a mother's sacrifice, as this baby boy that she had suffered for so much, and who now lay so contentedly in the arms of another woman.

Like a chubby angel peering out of snowy clouds, so he looked now within that dainty whiteness of cambric and filmy lace.

Nine weeks had passed since she had last seen him. What a difference those weeks had made upon him! He seemed almost twice the size he had been then. His cheeks were filled out and like red roses, his lips like ripe strawberries, his chin, neck, and brow white as milk, and dimpling with health and fatness.

He was a wonder, a glory, a glimpse of Heaven, that now shone before her, to mock her devotion, for it was all to be taken from her.

The hair, all flossy gold, had grown a couple of inches at least since she last touched it. It was going to be wavy, for already it had begun to turn round and twist about in countless little kiss-curls.

He was watching that love-lorn, kneeling worshipper, with blurred, tear-crammed eyes at first and pouting lips.

Gradually the tear-drops left the cerulean eyes, and trickled down the rosy cheeks like bright diamonds. He could see her better now than he had done at first, as the light from the barred window fell upon her wan, adoring face. As he watched, he put a fat thumb

into his mouth and began to suck it meditatively. He was studying her and thinking where he had seen her before. Male-like, he found his thoughts greatly assisted by having something to suck.

Soft and musical, as the dying strains of a violin, came the murmur from that mother's heart: "My darling, my beautiful darling!" He had heard music like that before, in his dreams, perhaps. He liked the sound. All males are lured by dulcet tones, young or old.

Pulling his wet thumb out of his mouth, he turned himself right round so as to face the suppliant, and then he recognised her.

With a wide laugh that revealed one little bit of ivory protruding from his gums, and a chuckling coo, he suddenly spread out his dimpled bare arms towards her. Next instant she had clutched him to her heart and was smothering him with kisses.

Laughing and sobbing, weeping and kissing, the mother sat on the cold stone flags of that cell and rocked her baby in her arms. She forgot, for the moment, that he was no longer hers; she only knew that she held him, and that he was real and not a dream. Her face was transfigured; she was not the apathetic prison hospital drudge, she was a sentient, throbbing woman, with a soul sanctified by her Maker, a holy and tender matron who had just received the Sacrament from her God.

These were the first tears which she had shed since her conviction. They had been drawn from her heart by her sinless child. They came like the first drops of rain to a thirsty land, making the withered emotions throw out fresh shoots.

Henceforth she would be able to feel her sorrow; henceforth she would be able to live. She had been stunned and in a state of coma, which is a living death, before. She would now be a reasoning and a suffering being.

It is better to suffer than to sleep. It is better to work than to rest. The wound is mortal when it no longer hurts.

She was not happy now. She would never be quite happy in her life again, perhaps. But she was able to calculate her losses now and prepare herself for what the future held. Yet half-an-hour was all the time she had been allowed for this last interview, and already, as she was warned presently, twenty minutes had gone by. Twenty minutes, and she had only just made friends with her baby, just discovered that he had cut his first tooth.

"Look alive there, No. B. 45. You have only got ten minutes more to blubber over that blessed kid," remarked the she-dragon at the door in a grating voice as if a coarse file had been drawn over an iron bar.

Hope glanced up with agony, and drew her baby closer to her shoddy-covered bosom. Her meekness had left her now. They would have to use force before they got her to quit her grasp of that baby. She was growing savage. There are rights above prison regulations.

Fortunately, at this moment the doctor and the chaplain entered. They had already seen Lewis John in his princely attire, and heard who was his patroness. They came now from the Governor, whom they had interviewed on No. B. 45's behalf.

"You need not hurry, No. 45," said the chaplain

kindly. "We have just seen the Governor, and he grants you another hour."

The mother turned her swimming eyes on the doctor and the chaplain.

"God bless you both for this boon. My baby has only just now recognised me."

"A pretty child," observed the chaplain, patting its velvet cheek.

"I am glad you have seen him," said the doctor kindly, as he took the mother's thin wrist in his hand, then touched her lightly on the brow. "These are splendid little doctors. Stick to him for the next hour, and I have great hopes of your recovery."

"What do you think of No. 45?" asked the chaplain of the doctor, after they had gone through the visiting cell.

"She is a lady, of course," answered the doctor, shrugging his shoulders. "And, as far as my reading of character goes, by no means the type of a criminal. Yet ladies are sometimes seized with kleptomania. It may have been one of those cases of sudden temptation or irresponsible seizure. She has exhibited symptoms of catalepsy, and that is a sign of brain disturbance. However, I trust that she has got over the crisis."

"I suppose there is no use thinking she is innocent of this charge?" asked the chaplain. "I have just heard she comes of a most respectable family, and that her husband is a prominent man in society."

"Who is he?" asked the doctor with interest.

"Sir Lewis Eastlake. He is at present in Canada travelling, only this is strictly *entre nous*."

"And her family?"

"Her maiden name was Waldred, and her brother was, I believe, in your profession."

"Was his name John Waldred?"

"Yes, that was his name; late of Cherbourg."

"Then, by George! she may be an innocent woman, after all, for Dr. John Waldred was one of the finest and most honourable fellows going. I must try to make her as comfortable as possible for the rest of her stay, if only for the sake of her brother."

"The Duchess Valerie Idumea is also much interested in her."

"Then, by Jove, she ought to be an innocent woman!" answered the doctor, as he shook hands with his reverend colleague and sought his own quarters of the prison.

It was well for No. B. 45 that the doctor and the chaplain had interested themselves in her behalf and gained her this respite. She had just reached a most critical period in her life, when the brain fibres were beginning to receive their first nourishment, after lying crushed for the past weeks. The blood had commenced to flow freely from her heart and fill those thread-like vessels upon which so much depends, when humanity is trembling on the borderland between sanity and insanity. Let one of those small veins become surcharged to the bursting point, and hopeless lunacy or death is the result.

CHAPTER XXV.

GOOD-BYE, BABY.

THE mother was saved by the presence of her child, and the opportune arrival of her spiritual and medical advisers, from a fate in comparison to which death by the rack would be a thousand times preferable. The blood poured from her heart up to her brain with beneficent liquidity and warmth, gradually spreading out, without undue force to all those lesser veins, until she became once more a reasoning and a thinking being.

Her love for and delight in her child distributed the flow equally through her frame. Every faculty woke up; the faculty of pain and of pleasure, and called for their quantum of nutriment.

The Duchess Valerie had paralysed her. Her baby-boy had set the wires working once again. Only if she had been parted at the allotted prison time, the lunatic asylum would, probably, have had another hopeless inmate. She would have become a wild beast. The brutal warder would have exercised her full force, and overthrown a mind which, compared to her low intelligence, was as Shakspere's to a mollusc. It is a pity that human destinies have to be entrusted to such bestial forces as are employed in prisons and asylums.

The female warder, who had been chosen for her superior brute force, sat at the door and growled

because she was kept an hour past her time; yet, bull-dog like, she did not neglect her duty. Hope Eastlake, No. B. 45, took her hour of grace, and abandoned thought for the first three quarters of it.

She examined her boy from top to toe, and found him perfect. She enquired and listened to all his little ailments with eager interest. How he had cut that wonderful white tooth, with what occurred before and afterwards.

She had heard with satisfaction, how they were going to the sea-side, to a little village on the Brighton sea-board, where they would have fresh air and good country milk. All that satisfied her hungry heart.

She was glad to hear that her good friend had been appointed to look after the boy, for she knew that she would do her duty. She was pleased, also, to know that Mrs. Hambly would be well paid for her care. In fact all the arrangements pleased her, excepting one—that she, the mother, was to be separated from her child.

"See yer, my dear," whispered Mrs. Hambly, "don't you worry, my dear. I'll let you know where baby and I be. You can see him when you like, so as you can manage to keep it dark. You get a disguise—a wig and a pair of blue glasses, and them sort of things as women does in the stories when they wants to be unknown to their 'usbands. Then you can come as my friend or niece, or sister-in-law, or summat of that sort, and see Lewis John as often as you likes."

The fond mother laughed while she caught at this romantic idea. It wasn't yet, the eternal parting She might manage to earn enough to keep her in some of those out of the way villages, and see her son occa-

sionally, after her time was up. Her spirits revived as she thought of it. To see her son occasionally and know he was safe would compensate her for many a lonely hour of sorrow and labour.

Thus, while cuddling and kissing the boy and watching him casting out his legs and arms, she had one short hour of unutterable joy. She flung her whole soul into that hour and was almost happy. She danced him up and down, while he crowed and cooed like a turtle dove; she devoured his pretty toes and kissed every dimple on his legs and arms. e crushed him to her bosom, and became once m a young girl. He was her own—her very own—for one long hour.

Alas! the hour flew by as if it had only been a few minutes, and that hateful, rasping voice cried:

"Only ten minutes, No. 45. Hurry up with that tom-foolery."

"Kiss him, warder. Isn't he a darling?" sang Hope, as she danced up to the grim dragon and held out her treasure proudly. He was now quite used to the company and surroundings, and prepared to take up with anyone.

"He is well enough, as far as kids go, only I don't care much for 'em," answered the dragon grimly, yet ignoring the liberty her charge had taken.

"That is a pity," answered Hope, gaily. "Never mind, you'll have one of your own, perhaps, some day; then you'll love him as I do this dear joy."

"Five more minutes, No. 45," replied the implacable dragon sourly. She was resenting such liberties now in this felon.

Five minutes. The mad joy went out of Hope

Eastlake's heart. She suddenly became silent and tragic.

"Tell me how I am to hear from you?" she said in a low tone to Mrs. Hambly.

"I'll get someone to write my address, and send it on to you," answered the old woman.

"Give it to the chaplain. He is a good man, and will give it to me when I leave the prison. Ah! you and little Lewis have given me new life."

She undid the dress of the baby, and saw a little pimple on his back. That took up some more minutes to discuss, then the fatal summons came.

"Time's up."

"Ah, warder, one more minute."

"No; time's up."

The last wild clutch and kiss to the child she could own no more. He smiled up at her and cooed and crowed, then he relapsed on to his bottle, fagged out with so much demonstration.

He was fast asleep when the parting came, and his cloak and cape were fastened on him. He had done a great work to a poor hungry soul, although he was unconscious of this.

The last kiss, and the last embrace to good Mrs. Hambly, and then 45 was once more alone.

Yet not so bad as she had been before. She had a memory now to feed upon, and something in the future to live up to.

The doctor was kind to her after this, for her brother was known to him by repute. The chaplain also was attentive to her, and, as soon as her three months were up, permitted her to attend at the Communion-table.

As her brain powers returned, she soon began to

take her position with those low-caste hireling nurses who were about as ignorant as human beings could be. Hope Eastlake had qualified as a nurse, and she had high intelligence. The others were absolutely clowns and ignoramuses. They had only been appointed for their brute force, and were little above the habitual criminals.

The doctor spoke to the governor, and very soon No. 45 was appointed to the wards as a qualified nurse. Thus she passed the rest of her four months, aiding the doctor and conciliating those ignorant mercenaries who had not a single proclivity or calling for their work. They mocked her because she had been convicted while they still remained free. But when B. 45 left the prison, both doctor and patients sent her away with sincere regrets and blessings.

When the day came that No. B. 45 could once more resume the name she had borne in the world, there was universal mourning in Reading Gaol. She had acted as a good angel to many a lost soul.

She departed with a good character from the doctor, the chaplain and the governor. As the governor said good-bye he placed in her hand a cheque for a hundred pounds. He would not tell her where it had come from, but she guessed.

She did not decline that hundred pounds, however. She was thinking of her child and her sacrifice. She had got over false sentiment, therefore she accepted the money and went on her way—into oblivion.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NOBLESSE OBLIGE.

THE voyagers did not linger in the Caribbean Sea, beautiful although it was. Those deep transparent waters, with the fertile and mountainous islands, were as fraught with danger as they were delicious to look upon. Those blazing days may have suited the pirates of old, but they were too exhausting to suit the Duchess Valerie and her fastidious guests. The cold nights, with their deadly dews; the heavy vegetation, and germ-impregnated atmosphere were too suggestive of ague and yellow fever. That cyclone, also, which had caught them so unexpectedly, was only an infant hurricane, compared with what might rush down any day or night.

They were fortunate, however, and managed to see a great number of the sights worth visiting without taking either fever or experiencing any more bad weather.

They steamed in by the Mona Channel, with Hayti on the one side and Porto Rico on the other. They satiated their artistic senses with watching blue rugged mountain peaks and tropical valleys. They felt what amateurs they were in the fine art of idling when they saw how the natives of those fertile islands managed to conduct their daily lives. They decided that these good people could not possibly make less exertion, and yet they seemed to enjoy the *dolce far niente*. These happy islands were very picturesque

and redolent of odours such as few other lands or cities could produce. The islanders were ladies and gentlemen in whom it was ridiculous to expect to find any of the cardinal virtues, and, as the one cardinal vice, sloth, subordinated most of the others, they might be considered ultra-aristocratic.

How the natives ever managed to cultivate and gather their sugar canes, tobacco plants, and fruit, was a conundrum which the travellers never solved. As for rum and cigar-making, it was just as well that they did not take the trouble to see how these were produced, particularly the latter industry.

They saw San Domingo and the other towns of Hayti, swept through the Windward and Bahama Channels until they reached Havana ; then to Santiago, and on to Kingstown, in Jamaica, and from these places on to Trinidad, taking the numerous islands *en route.*

It was becoming too hot for them to linger long at this portion of their voyage. A glance at the French convict settlement, Cayenne, and the engineers put on full speed and rushed over the equator, while the passengers gasped as they lay under the punkahs, and did their best to imitate the natives of Hayti and Cuba.

At Rio Janeiro, with its magnificent harbour, they rested for three days, while the Gadfly was taking in coal and provisions. At Buenos Ayres, that city of fine churches and numerous steps, they found the ocean tramp which had been sent out by the Moose Mining Company. The Duchess and her guests went over and inspected the May Queen, as this slow but sure steamer was called. The hired miners were all

in good condition. and had enjoyed their voyage immensely.

Downwards they steamed after this towards the land of the Patagonians. They had once again to resort to their furs and winter clothing. Through the picturesque but stormy and tortuous Straits of Magellan, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and then northwards once more.

The voyagers were keeping diaries now, and noting the different points of interest as they passed along. The Bishop particularly spent a great deal of his time filling up his log-book.

But as this is not a record of travel, we had best hasten to our scene of action. The *Gadfly* did not do this, however; but instead turned her prow into many a picturesque harbour as she fluttered round this vast continent.

Valdiva, Valparaiso, Lima, Quito, with the host of smaller cities between, all of vast historical interest and ravishing loveliness. Their captain hugged the shores as closely as he could with safety; therefore, they had all the advantages of this most glorious, if long, trip.

They were in the most robust condition of health. These changes ashore had prevented them from tiring of each other's company. Yet they were considerably domesticated and familiar with each other's peculiarities and shortcomings by this time. They aired their costumes and their different suits religiously, yet there was a comrade-like and freer spirit pervading the social atmosphere.

Those who had started flirting to pass time had either grown sick of the game, or else passed into a

more serious and dangerous stage. They had made a kind of small world for themselves during those months of constant intercourse, and lost a great deal of their former interest in the other and larger world.

Of course, they received constant supplies of letters, papers, and magazines at each of the ports where they put in. They kept up a regular intercourse with that distant world, but their interest was less keen than it had been. Propinquity had produced the usual result.

Those glorious Southern moonlight and starry nights, with the sound of the swishing seas sounding in their ears; the languor of the tropics, or the grandeur of the distant coast line, with those lofty and ever-changing mountain peaks; that spirit of romance, which the ocean never fails to impart, even in the hearts of the most prosaic, bewitched and enthralled them all.

Even the stately dowagers found themselves sighing often as they recalled the past that might have been had they only been milkmaids instead of the elect. They had chosen the wiser part when their hour came to choose; still the temptation to take the other had been great.

> "God pity them both! and pity us all,
> Who vainly the dreams of youth recall.
>
> For of all sad words of tongue and pen,
> The saddest of these: 'It might have been.'"

These stately dowagers were perfectly aware that it could never have been for them any more than such follies could be for those maidens under their charge. Neither would they have altered their destinies, for

they were quite satisfied with what had been, as the judge was who "wedded the wife of richest dower."

But under the sorcery of the soft sea wind they grew wonderfully indulgent and oblivious to the actions of the maids and matrons, and spent their time dreaming about their spring days of life.

The Bishop also had been guilty, on several occasions, of secretly composing roundelays and sonnets, after the manner of his college days—a most degenerate weakness for a Bishop to be guilty of. True, he had kept those serious lapses to himself; yet, sad to have to write, instead of tearing these effusions up as soon as perpetrated, he made corrected copies of them, and found a senile pleasure in reading them aloud when he was alone.

The sea voyage had done this for his lordship. It had also made him reckless enough to discard Hollands and sodas, and to indulge wantonly in the *Gadfly* old port wine. As he said to Eric St. Arnoul, he really felt as if years had flown from his bones. Now, a Bishop who takes to poetry and port wine, like the dowager who takes to dreaming about the past, is apt to become like a watch dog that has been gorged with drugged meat. But they were on the spot, and blinded or muzzled, their presence rendered the *Gadfly sans reproche.*

The voyagers halted at San Francisco long enough to provide themselves with fresh toilets and costumes, &c., making the San Francisco dressmakers and tailors, &c., rejoice. Then they steamed on once more straight for Victoria, and the romantic Fjords of British Columbia and Alaska.

It was the pleasant month of May now, so that

this part of the journey was simply delicious. The scenery as they advanced north, surpassed Norway, while the air was the purest and most invigorating that they had ever inhaled.

Day after day, steaming through transparent sounds and gorges at once solemn and exquisite in their vegetation and colouring, over dangerous maelstrom and rapids, past mighty glaciers, the voyage round South America faded almost from their memories at the sight of the Northern magnificence of this astonishing New World.

They found the *May Queen* waiting for them at Circle City, which was almost deserted, and passed several steamers laden with hopeful passengers going up to this new El Dorado.

The crowd of adventurers surprised those on board the *Gadfly;* but they were more astonished, when they arrived at Dawson City, to find what a host had already taken possession of the land.

They had expected to find a small township, but they were not prepared to see such an assemblage of tents and cabins in active course of erection.

It was like Pandemonium broken loose, all the gamblers, bullies, thieves and low women of America and other countries seemed to have rushed up, mad after plunder. There was no longer any law nor order. The police, although largely reinforced, and the respectable members of the community, were so greatly in the minority of those lawless and predatory invaders.

They were rushing on from all the passes in unruly and riotous battalions, as well as disembarking from the Alaska steamers. Already fifty thousand had

camped on the ground, their tents and huts lining the river for miles. It was a vast city of log huts and canvas tents, in the majority of which were the worst and most abandoned criminals and decadents. Such a host of ruffianly and debauched wretches, male and female, never before assembled on British soil. Such shameless flaunting of vice, such open violence, such boasting, bragging and swaggering. Only the most lawless and corrupt of democracies could produce these foul and vicious vermin.

They swarmed the streets and banks of the river; they crowded the drinking and dancing saloons, and shocked those who had any sense of decency left with their bestiality; they yelled that they were representatives of America, and that the Yukon by rights ought to belong to the Stars and Stripes; also that they meant to have their rights presently.

The Canadian Mounted Police rode about in bands, armed to the teeth. Claimholders also went about with compressed lips and stern eyes. They were watching and waiting on the next development of this new invasion; they kept their tempers under as much as possible, for they were in a miserable minority, about one to six, at least.

Still they looked out and examined each new-comer, passing over the mixed scum of all nations who called themselves American citizens, and enrolled all others into their vigilance bands. As yet, the savage beasts were rioting in disorganised masses, content to commit small robberies, isolated murders and open swindles, while they ate and drank up the contents of the stores.

Dawson City was on the eve of an outbreak, and

each honest man was bracing himself to face the storm.

Highwaymen ransacked the outside district, and stuck up those diggers and claimholders who were hurrying into the city to fight for the law and the Government. No one was safe now who could not protect himself by force of arms. The country was in a state of embryo anarchy.

It was utterly impossible for the Duchess or any of her refined guests to land amidst this horrible rabble. What could be seen of them from the deck of the *Gadfly* convinced her of this. Fortunate, also, that they were both well armed and plentifully provisioned.

They anchored, therefore, as did their consort, the *May Queen*, in the middle of the stream, while signals were sent ashore for the authorities to come on board. In a short time the inspector of the police, with the gold commissioner, appeared, and were received with due state. Both gentlemen looked terribly jaded and anxious. For the past fortnight they had scarcely slept, expecting the riot to burst upon them at any hour.

They were unfeignedly glad, however, to note the long range and the Maxim and Gatling guns which now stood unmasked on the deck.

"I trust you have a good store of ammunition, captain," observed the inspector, as he stepped on board, and glanced round him with keen satisfaction. He had been an old yachtsman once upon a time himself, and, therefore, could appreciate a good thing when he saw it.

"Yes; quite enough to bombard Dawson City for a week or two," replied the Captain.

"Ten hours would finish the game up here with those criminals," observed the inspector, quietly. "I am greatly indebted to you for coming so opportunely."

The Duchess Valerie grasped the situation quickly, as did her male guests. As for the ladies, well, they behaved as all true aristocrats do when placed in positions of danger. They left the discussion of battle to their males, and prepared themselves calmly to endure what fate had next in store for them. That is how the aristocrats baffle the revolutionaries always.

"I suppose you have some honest and law-abiding United States Americans on the field, who will repudiate these ruffians and help you in the case of a riot?" asked the Duchess of the chief of the police.

He shook his head gravely as he replied:

"We have many respectable Yankees on the gold-fields, who, as yet, have no claims, but have come to work, and others who have taken out miners' rights already. These unplaced men would not join in open and barefaced robbery and murders, but I doubt if they would lend us their aid. The utmost we could expect from them would be neutrality. The mine-holders, of course, must side with us in their own interests; nearly without exception our neighbours down South are ruled by two master passions which dominate their other vices and virtues. These are acquisitiveness and vanity. Add to these a third infirmity, and you have the key-note to the Yankee character; a most unreasonable jealousy of Canada, because it is British."

The chief of police enjoyed airing his opinions. In the present instance he was speaking from a long and

hard experience of the shady side of American human nature.

"A United States citizen begins and carries on his life with but two ideas before him; to make money and to spend what he has made in buying a title into his family, if he can. He is generally as strict in his religious observances as he is lax in his moral conceptions. He can no more resist the sniff of gold than a cat can resist the scent of a mouse; and when he is on the trail of a money speculation, or a place in office, he has as much pity and conscience as an Apache after a scalp."

"Then the Yankee is a decadent?" observed the Bishop sententiously.

"If the desire to grab and overreach all he can is a sign of decadence, then I think your verdict is right, my lord," answered the chief.

"Who else can you depend upon in a crisis like this, besides the mine-owners?" asked the Duchess a little impatiently.

"Well, your grace, we have a fair show of Japs on the ground, who, I trust, will side with us. The Indians also from the Yukon will to a man help us, for they abhor the Stars and Stripes like poison. As for the other nationalities—Russians, Germans, and outside Frenchmen—I expect they will side with the 'Toughs.' Our safety up to the present has lain in the fact, that although there are some smart blackguards amongst them, they have not yet organised. They are, as yet, content to gamble and drink, riot, murder, and rob isolated parties. But let them once combine and find a leader, our serious troubles begin. This I am expecting any hour."

"What would you advise us to do, so that we may be of some use to you?"

"Keep where you are, in the middle of the stream, and have your ammunition out and ready for instant use."

"Yes; and what more?"

"We have a large amount of gold dust in our storehouses, which we should like to hand over to your care if it is not giving you too great a responsibility."

"Not at all. You are willing, gentlemen, I suppose, to look after the gold dust?"

All agreed with the decision of the Duchess; then she turned once more to the gold commissioner and police chief.

"We are willing to place ourselves entirely under your directions. Is there anything else you can suggest?"

"Well, your grace, and my lord, ladies and gentlemen, if I may be permitted to spread about your titles in the city when I go ashore, I think we may almost reckon on the active help of the respectable Yankee section. There are no institutions modern democrats cotton to more, than that of the aristocracy of Old England. To gain the approval and patronage of such as your grace, they will even fraternise with a Canadian. It will be a mighty force in our favour if you will allow us to advertise your arrival in Dawson City."

The Duchess and her companions laughed merrily at this suggestion. Then she said:

"Advertise us by all means. We will give you our full names, titles and pedigrees if you like."

"That ought to pour oil on the troubled waters,"

answered the inspector. "It will be almost as good as a new discovery of gold."

"That reminds me," said her Grace. "I have some interests in several of the claims. Here are the numbers and localities. Can you tell me if they are good investments?"

The Commissioner looked into the pocket-book of the Duchess, and replied promptly:

"These are five of the best paying claims on the diggings. The holders are in the city now, and over a hundred and eighty thousand pounds' worth of their gold dust are at present under my charge. I shall send these men to see your grace as soon as I get ashore, and arrange about the removing of their property to the *Gadfly*."

"And my friend Sir Lewis Eastlake, who came over here last summer to inspect those mines. Is he also in the city?"

"I was not aware that he had a handle to his name," replied the commissioner. "But I know the gentleman very well. He has been over with a friend prospecting all the winter. Where we cannot yet tell; but they may come in any day, if they have had luck."

The Duchess expected an answer of this kind, for she knew, if Sir Lewis had been in the city, he would have recognised the yacht, and been already on board. It was a bitter disappointment to her when she heard that the man she had come so far to see was not there to receive her. She, however, kept under control her feelings, and flung herself into business.

Several of the gentlemen went ashore with the com-

missioner and chief. They were away for over three hours, and brought back a terrible account of the social condition of the town. The revolver and the bowie knife ruled the roost. No decent woman dared venture outside her cabin, and even there they were forced to barricade themselves in. Men who were known to be successful were waylaid and lured into the drinking-saloons in the most open and shameless manner by those abandoned outcasts and scum of the world—Old and New. Side by side with the most dilapidated and squalid of rags were the most gaudy of silks, satins, and feathers.

When a lucky digger would not drink and gamble, he was marked out as a likely subject for lynching or shooting.

Inside those saloons the squalor and ribaldry were disgusting. They were like the lowest of thieves' dens.

A few months before many of these places aped at respectability, and the gambling was conducted on a fair, if somewhat reckless, system. In those days the citizens had known each other. If a player shewed temper over his losings he was requested to go out of the game, and he did.

Now most of the original landlords were glad to sell their businesses for what they could get, and clear out for the sake of their own lives, and their families.

The professional gamblers, bullies, and thieves had taken possession, with their vile consorts and associates, and transformed these places into "hells." The drink now sold in Dawson City was unadulterated poison.

There was scarcely any darkness now; while the

mosquitoes swarmed about in myriads, like tormenting fiends driving the damned to madness.

Food was scarce, in spite of the large supplies which every steamer brought in, and sold at siege prices. These drink-maddened devils did not seem to care for much food, so long as they could purchase their particular liquid poison. Gold digging had been, for the past week, suspended, and the distant mines almost abandoned. The legitimate miners felt that their future safety lay in now banding together. The conflict between order and disorder, law and licence, could not much longer be delayed.

Yet the river was as full of craft as the bank on Dawson City side was crammed with disorderly invaders. It was the wildest scene of debauchery and outrage that even the oldest diggers had ever experienced.

The *Gadfly* was not the only luxurious ship on the river. Three other floating hotels had come up from San Francisco, furnished in the most extravagant fashion. A couple of these belonged to New York speculators, who were doing a roaring trade. Where gold is found women will rush ; and of late a regular Klondike craze had set in, even amongst those who termed themselves high toned. Young ladies of the advanced school, who boasted they had cast aside the shackles which made slaves of their mothers and grandmothers ; ladies who had been so often through the divorce-courts that they had forgotten the number of their husbands. Mothers were there, also, who had repudiated their children, and left them to be brought up by the State.

In Dawson City, amongst those money-devouring

hybrids and atavists, atrocities were perpetrated which recalled the most degenerate days of Rome. The "Tough" of the slums was almost wholesome, compared to some of those daintily-costumed and emancipated degenerates.

The advent of the *Gadfly* made a flutter amongst those tuft-hunting and characterless States idlers. They all rushed with their visiting cards and their latest matrimonial names to pay court to the real thing in blood. In New York they might boast that they were of Royal blood from a hundred monarchs, but they wanted to be taken up by these Normans for all that.

The fashionable gamblers also sent in their cards, with the clubs to which they belonged. But the young Duchess and her friends were conservative and discreet. They were acting under the sage advice of the Government officials. and "kept themselves select" from those society ladies and high-toned gamblers. When they gave entertainments on board they allowed the commissioner to choose their guests.

Acting on these principles, they became immensely unpopular in less than a week's time. The emancipated ladies hired bullies to revenge their outraged dignity, the result of which was that pot-shots were sent at the saloon portholes of the *Gadfly*.

They dropped the bullet-proof shutters over their portholes after these demonstrations, and prepared for war. The Gatling and Maxim guns, also the long range one, were placed in position and loaded.

During this time only the men had ventured ashore, and only then under the protection of the police. Most of the gold which had not been entrusted to the

departing steamers had, however, been during that week transported to the holds of the *Gadfly* and the *May Queen*. Both vessels lay side by side well away from shore.

One day—it was day now nearly all the twenty-four hours—but by the ship's chronometer, one morning, the chief of police came on board. His news poured fresh blood into those descendants of fighters.

"I want your grace to take our women on your yacht and the *May Queen*. These sports have at length found an orator and a leader."

They had themselves, from the decks, noticed huge demonstrations and processions taking place on the banks. Wild shoutings and acclaims from gathered crowds and less private pistol practice.

"Yes; send your wives on board. We will cater for them and defend them as far as we can."

The rioters had not, as yet, declared war. They permitted the women and children to be conducted on board the two ships without molestation.

Two hours afterwards, however, the tempest burst. From the deck of the *Gadfly* the Duchess and her friends saw a compact mass carrying arms, and star and striped banners, on the march. Poor old Jonathan was made to bear the blame of these outrages.

They approached the commissioner's log hut, while their leader expounded their terms:

"Communities like this," he said, "must be ruled by the majority." The majority were representatives of the States; therefore, they were resolved to make their own laws and regulations. The inhabitants of the *Gadfly* had arranged their programme with the authorities. On the hoisting of the Union Jack over

the commissioner's office, they were to open their fusillade.

For an hour after this they saw the forms of the Government officials standing out from the crowd and waving their arms. They were doing their utmost to bring matters once again into order.

Then the officials retired, and the dense crowd were left listening to their leader, a burly man in a red shirt and moleskin trousers.

All at once the crowd made a rush for the houses within which the legitimate miners were sheltered. Some shots were fired, but from which side first no one could afterwards tell. The wives of the miners hid their faces in their hands, and started up a chorus of shrieks.

Then the Union Jack was drawn up to the top of the Government flagstaff, and, as it fluttered out, Captain Osborn, of the *Gadfly*, gave his orders, and the battle of Klondike commenced.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SIR LEWIS EASTLAKE JOINS THE DUCHESS VALERIE.

"JERUSALEM!" ejaculated Bill Sykes, as soon as he had recovered his voice. "Wall, this licks creation. I thought we were lively down Texas way, but this beats the ranches holler."

He was referring to the vast show of tents which covered the distant and opposite bank, with the craft upon the river.

"When I left the City there warn't more than forty log cabins and about five hundred tents outside Front

Street, and now, dash me, if this ain't as big a camp as that of Napoleon's when he was going to take England."

Along the track by which they had brought their gold dust they had not met a white man. Now to see those evidences of civilisation made them eager to get down to the ferry. But still, they laid down their packs and sat down to rest before making the descent.

Sir Lewis shaded his eyes with his hands from the bright sunshine and then he saw what he was looking for.

"That is the *Gadfly*, Bill, the yacht of my friend, the Duchess Idumea."

"Your friend?" gasped Bill Sykes, dropping his pipe in his amazement. "And who the deuce are you when you are at home, if a Duchess is your friend?"

"Oh, I'm only a simple baronet at home. Sir Lewis Eastlake, they call me over there."

"By George! Then I suppose you've told me this now, so that I might know how to keep my place over thar, eh?"

"Good Heavens! Sykes, how could you think me such a bounder?" cried the Baronet vehemently, as he turned upon his companion. "Have I done anything since we have been together to give you such an opinion of me?"

"Wall, no, pard, you hain't. I will say you have acted white all through up to now. But why have you told me this now, unless you mean us to split partnership, is what I want to know?"

Bill Sykes spoke gently, as he always did previous to letting out. He was a staunch enough pal, but like all primitive natures, exceedingly prone to suspicion.

He was also somewhat difficult to reason with once he had got an idea into his head. His present idea, which had so suddenly flashed upon him, was that his mate might wish to be his master. He resented this jealously. With all his vices Bill was not a tuft-hunter. He had not been enough about Western cities to acquire this fine democratic taste. He liked more daring sport than this sort of hunting, and was quite prepared now to reason the subject out with his friend, at *ten paces distant*, and a revolver at each end, if he meant him to take a subordinate position.

"If you didn't mean to make me knuckle down or split with you, Sir Lewis Eastlake, what in tarnation did you mean by telling me this *now*, instead of when we first met, four months ago?"

Sir Lewis was a good-natured fellow and knew the peppery nature of his questioner, therefore he answered bluntly:

"You don't suppose I care to go about the diggings with my title blazed upon my shirt, like a tabard, eh?"

"No. But why blaze it now?"

"Because I didn't want my partner to feel any way awkward when I introduced him, as I shall do in a few more hours."

"Ah! that's all, is it? You ain't ashamed of my company, then?"

"I should say not, pard. I'd be a fine cad, shouldn't I, if I could be, after what you've done for me."

Bill looked gloomily at the distant yacht for a few moments while he puffed at his pipe. Then he said cheerfully:

"I say, pard, I suppose there will be a lot of howling swells on board that 'ere craft?"

"Oh, yes. I don't suppose her grace would come this length without company."

"Her grace? Is that what you call a duchess?'

"Oh, there is no necessity to call her that. You can call her my dear duchess, or my darling, if she gets friendly enough with you. Your grace, however, will do for a start."

"I reckon she is mighty proud?"

"Not at all, she puts on much less side than a barmaid or a ballet-girl would. No real lady poses unless she is insulted, and I can trust you never to do that, Bill."

"You may, pard," answered Bill calmly. "We don't insult women where I come from."

They were at present about eight miles from the ferry that would take them over the river, and with some pretty stiff cliffs to get over before they could get down to the water's edge. The atmosphere, however, was so luminous and clear—for, according to the time, it was about four o'clock in the morning—that they were able to discern objects very distinctly even at that distance. They did not require a rest either, for with their extended march they were as hardy as the Indians with them.

It was a fine view that spread before them at this point of their journey. The Klondike river rushing along its steep banks, with the cliffs at parts coming right into the stream. In the distance lay Dawson City on its swampy flats and the crowd of boats and steamers dotting the river. They were too far off to see the inhabitants yet, but the ranges of tents were

plainly marked out against the muddy soil and wooded background. It was July now, and the ice-packs had all floated down the river. There was still ice and snow on the distant peaks, which never melted all the year round, but on the low ground rarest mosses and flowers were growing luxuriously under the fierce summer heat.

The whole air was dense with mosquitoes, large and hungry vampires, that never ceased their buzzing, blood-sucking and venomous stinging. They bred in these lush arctic mosses and gave no rest to anything that had blood and life. Winter was trying to the unaccustomed human constitution, but summer in the Yukon was even more trying, with the mosquitoes' everlasting and maddening hish. But humanity can get used to any kind of discomfort and misery. By this time the travellers were used even to the mosquitoes of Klondike.

After a rest, they reloaded themselves and once more resumed their journey.

Over the sterile rocky crests they strode and climbed, down steep banks where they sank knee deep in moss. Through miry swamps they struggled, up to the waist at times when they made a false step ; then the Indian guides had to haul them out before they were submerged.

These had been their experiences all the way from their lucky discovery, so that they did not mind the last half-dozen miles.

There were no signs of any prospecting at this part of the river, nor did they meet anyone until they were within a mile of the ford.

Then they saw a sight which partly prepared them

for what lay before them. Five corpses lay on the trail with their rifled baggage lying beside them. The corpses had been half devoured by wolves or dogs, and were too far advanced in decomposition to bear a near inspection. The travellers became grim and thoughtful after they had hurried past, holding their nostrils with their fingers.

"It strikes me, pard, that we had better keep our eyes skinned and our weapons ready, with all this gold-dust on our backs," remarked Bill as he looked round him warily and took out one of his revolvers from his belt. "Dawson City ain't the home of honesty it was six months ago, I reckon. Some of the Western sports have migrated North."

The others followed his example with their arms, and held them ready, as they advanced cautiously through the birch wood.

"Six months ago I saw sacks of gold-dust placed about the shelves and walls of the store-houses, with no other protection needed than the owner's name on them. Six months ago a man might have left his traps lying on the trail, and be sure to find them just as he left them when he came back, unless, of course, the dogs or the other wild animals got at them. I guess times have changed somewhat since then in this locality."

"It looks like it from those evidences we have just passed," replied Sir Lewis, shuddering slightly. "I must say I never saw a more honest and trusting set of men than were the gold-diggers of Klondike. When I was last here it was the fashion for a man to turn his back on the store-keepers and publicans while they were weighing out the gold for their bills, and it

was the same with the store-keepers when the miners went to purchase. They would say: "Just go in and help yourself to what you want, and hand me a list of what you have taken.'"

"I don't think we'll find that heavenly state of trust now in Dawson City. 'The Gates of the West' have been opened since we were last here, I reckon."

No accident, however, happened to them, and they reached the ferry safely. At the ferry, however, they found a number of Indians waiting their turn to be towed across. With them were three mounted police, who had brought them in. Sir Lewis and Bill Sykes could now see the opposite bank plainly, with the vast concourse of figures which were swarming about.

"Hallo!" shouted Bill to one of the troopers, whom he recognised, "are you celebrating the glorious Fourth of July over there?"

"It looks like it, don't it, Mr. Sykes; but, excuse me, will you introduce your friend?"

"Certainly," replied Bill; "let me introduce you to my friend and partner, Sir Lewis Eastlake—Trooper Gordon."

"Glad you have come down, Sir Lewis. We have been looking out for you anxiously. Any luck where you have come from?"

"Yes," replied both the baronet and his partner together. "We have struck it pretty richly in a creek four hundred miles from here, and have just come in to report."

"I wish you had come a week sooner," replied the trooper. "It might have averted the catastrophe which is about to happen. We have the toughest lot in Dawson City at present that I have seen anywhere."

He looked across the river, where the ferry-boat was coming-back. Then he suddenly cried :

"By Jupiter! but the catastrophe has happened! Look, boys, and make up your minds which side you'll take!—the Government or the 'Toughs'?"

As they looked the Union Jack rose up, and fluttered over the roof of the gold commissioner's cabin. Next moment a puff of white smoke burst from the side of the *Gadfly*, and rose up into the ambient air, followed by a dull and heavy report. The fray had commenced.

"You are, of course, on our side, Sir Lewis, being British? What side do you take, Mr. Sykes?"

"Wall, I reckon being a mine owner and a man of property now, I'll take sides with my partner, Sir Lewis Eastlake, and go against the 'Toughs,'" drawled Bill. "Now, get us over as soon as you can, and let us take a hand in the concert afore it is ended. England is my mother, America only my step-dam. I'm going to chip in for mammy, you bet, this show, Trooper Gordon."

"The *Gadfly* is mooring close in," cried Sir Lewis excitedly. "I can't wait for the ferry-boat."

"I can get you a boat in a few minutes if you want to row aboard," said the trooper, delighted to secure two such able allies. Five minutes more Sir Lewis, Bill Sykes, and their Indians were paddling across the stream towards the *Gadfly*. The Duchess Valerie and her company saw that small boat, and brought their rifles to bear on it.

Twenty paces distant, however, she recognised the man at the tiller, in spite of his muddy rags and unkempt appearance.

"It is Sir Lewis Eastlake," she said, quieting the effect of the tumult that raged in her heart, and doing her best to appear composed.

Next moment a rope was thrown to them, and then they all scrambled aboard.

"My friend, welcome back," cried the Duchess, advancing to the rough-looking digger, with out-spread hands, a lover-like glow in her dark eyes.

He bowed over and kissed her hands, then he raised himself and looked round him, nodding right and left to his old acquaintances whom he recognised.

"I have come in time, it seems," he said, laughing lightly, the light of battle illuminating his iron-grey eyes. He looked a veritable Norse pirate with his flowing brown beard and hair.

"Just in time, Lewis, old fellow," answered his old chum, Captain Eric St. Arnoul.

"Have you a barber on board?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, go down to the saloon; any of the stewards will serve you that way," said Eric.

"And, can I borrow a decent suit? There is time for me to look respectable before we come to close quarters."

"I'll go with you and shew you my wardrobe."

"Thanks. Permit me to introduce to your grace my friend, William Sykes. But for him I should have been a deader."

Bill Sykes, despite his native effrontery, had been a good deal perturbed in his mind as to his reception by such a lofty personage as a duchess. Had he only been able to visit the stores first he would have felt easier. But when he thought of his personal appearance, he felt abashed as he had never been before.

He would have liked to have slunk down unnoticed. But he was in for it. The Duchess approached like a goddess and put out both her hands, as she had done to her lover, saying in a rich and tremulous voice :

"Thank you ; thank you, Mr. Sykes. I am your debtor for life."

He was conquered. Never had he seen anything so dainty and lovely. Surely never had hands so soft and creamy and small been placed within his.

He followed Sir Lewis's example and kissed them ; then, dizzy with emotion, he followed his partner down to the saloon. From that moment, Bill Sykes, the ruffian of Texas, bade adieu to democracy and all its impulses, and became a squire of chivalry — a regular primrose knight!

The valet-stewards were deft, and quickly transformed the overland travellers into West End swells. Suits were found to suit them both, and then, after a hasty bath and a bottle of champagne, they appeared on deck prepared to take a hand in what both loved dearly—a fight.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RIOT—AND AFTERWARDS.

THE chief of the mounted police had not been quite fair to the respectable Yankee section of Dawson City. Without exception they repudiated the "Toughs" and gamblers, and took sides with the Canadian Government. When negotiations failed, they retired behind and within the log cabins, and opened fire energetically on the insurgents. Gathered together as

the mob were, in compact masses, the first shot of grape from the long range gun did fearful execution. As they looked from the deck of the *Gadfly* they saw it plunge its course through the crowd, making a ghastly lane between them that was appalling. For a moment the crowd stood irresolute, and then they scattered wildly, and sought shelter within the saloons.

Commander Osborne had concerted with the legitimates, and knew which of the cabins they occupied. Steering a little nearer the shore he re-opened his fire, aiming at saloon after saloon, and mercilessly yet methodically demolishing them one after the other. In an hour's time he had wrecked Front Street, as far as the rebels' shelters were concerned, and driven the survivors to their tents. They had not reckoned on the *Gadfly* having such an effective and powerful gun. Dawson City was now a mass of flames. The stores of whiskey caught first, and blazed up furiously, working destruction on the stores. In an hour's time there were no houses left, and the Government party were retreating to the woods behind. The *Gadfly* was left now to the fusillade of the rioters who had taken refuge in their tents.

When the town, as far as its log cabins were concerned, was destroyed, a pause followed. The air was filled with wood and gunpowder smoke, and a dense mist hung over the city. A mist impregnated with whiskey and paraffin fumes. Dismembered bodies were roasting amongst the mud that had lately been a township. Dawson City was now a smoking ruin.

That noxious mist crept over the river and enveloped the craft that were lying there.

This was the moment of danger from those rats

ashore. The captain of the *Gadfly* raised his anchor, and shifted his position to the centre of the river once more.

"Go below, ladies; and gentlemen, be ready. If they have any *nous* they will try and board us now," cried the captain.

The ladies retired and were barricaded into the saloon, and then the men stood ready for action.

The day was terribly sultry and calm. As the smoke swelled out from the big gun, it stuck to them like a dense white fog, and would not clear away. They could see nothing a couple of feet away, while the shores were completely hidden.

But they could hear, although they could not see, and so they listened breathlessly and intently.

The enemy was coming. From all sides they heard the swish of oars, and the pants of the rowers.

Round on both sides the Gatling and Maxim guns played constantly, making the air denser. Screams of agony told where they had wrought execution, while revolvers and Winchester bullets from the hidden boats replied. As yet, only two men on the *Gadfly* had been wounded slightly. The others lay under the bullet-proof gunwales and waited. They could not yet know, nor hear, what was being enacted on shore. They resumed their revolver fire, and held their cutlasses ready for action.

Ah! Some of the wretches had boarded by the bow and stern. The sailors were in the thick of it at the forecastle end, and the gentlemen at the stern. The Gatlings and Maxims were for the time silent. It was a fight in the fog, a battle with knives, cutlasses and revolvers. The gallant defenders of the

Gadfly closed round their guns and battled as the British had done at Abu Klea. The instinct of fight was in them, and they felt a grim joy as they tackled and slaughtered their degenerate antagonists.

All at once a slight breeze wafted down the river and blew the smoke towards the stern. Then the commander gave his orders to the engineers, and they started upwards.

Now they could see their antagonists, who were swarming the decks — bully wretches, who were masters with the knife and revolver, born pirates and rats.

It was something to see them, at all events; a big advantage that they were isolated from the boats that had been left behind. For the next ten minutes the carnage was frightful. Bill Sykes, of Whitechapel, might well have been a Norman of Hastings for the deeds of daring he accomplished with his bowie-knife and revolver. Sir Lewis Eastlake and Captain Eric St. Arnoul, with the other gentle aristocrats, cut and slaughtered like the worst of savages. In a quarter of an hour the *Gadfly* once more returned to her old moorings, free from invaders, her decks swimming with gore.

What a sight the streets presented when the smoke of the burning log cabins floated down the Klondyke river. A concourse of men and women were flying from the abandoned tents, and seeking refuge where they could amongst the woods and swamps of the Yukon. As they fled, the miners, with their allies—the Yankees, Japs, and Indians—followed hard after, emptying their Winchesters into the demoralised and retreating crowd. The fight was over. The *Gadfly*

had saved the Government, and the survivors could once more begin to build the city.

A battle of this description does not take long to finish. There were a good many wounded, both ashore and on the boats, but the day was gained.

Law and order again held sway at Dawson City. The wretches who thought to boss right were suppressed, and the minority had won the victory. Now they could go back to their claims and rejoice.

But the outcasts, who had abandoned their and provisions, were yet to be settled with. They had scattered into the woods and swamps, and had become desperate enough for anything.

The women, those hopeless outlaws of society whom nothing could redeem, the miners packed them off in the downward steamers, and paid their passages home to the lands which had produced them. Dawson City did what Paris had done during the German siege. They bequeathed these sirens to the enemy.

The property destroyed had been less than might have been expected under the circumstances. A considerable quantity of spirits was consumed, with provisions and outfits. But the authorities and miners had been so far prepared and had *cachéd* their individual stores some distance from the City.

The carnage, however, was great amongst the rioters. Men and women lay in mounds where they had fallen. The course of each volley from the long range could be traced by the lines of mutilated bodies lying about.

The trouble was not over yet, although for the time checked. Those desperate men who had been driven out of the camp were not likely to remain quiet, with

so many hundreds of miles between them and civilisation. Wanton drunkenness and native evil made them begin the fight. Hunger and despair would urge them to continue it, unless they were propitiated in some way.

A monster meeting was convened by the conquerors to consult about this emergency. Finally, a set of protective laws was drawn up and passed.

Amongst the laws, humane and politic, which were adopted were the following:

First: A free pardon was offered to all who laid down their arms, and submitted to the authorities.

Second: Their goods would be restored to all who submitted promptly.

Third: A fine would be exacted from those who submitted in order to cover the damage done.

Fourth: None but those who were prepared to work would be permitted to stay in the country. For wages, while they were waiting to take out their certificates. That is, no man would be allowed to stay who could not satisfy the commissioners that he had come to dig or prospect.

Fifth: Licenses were to be taken out by those desirous of selling spirits and intoxicants. Licenses also were to be at the discretion of the commissioners for dancing saloons, hotels, and public-houses. Hitherto no limitations nor restrictions had been placed upon these places.

As the miners drew up the regulations themselves for their future protection, they agreed to these laws willingly. Single women who came without protec-

tion also were placed under the inspection of the committee appointed. If they came to work as domestics or to purchase claims, they would be permitted to remain, not otherwise.

These rules and regulations were speedily printed and posted up inside the city and for miles round it. A month was allowed for the rebels to make their peace.

Meantime, the miners constituted themselves special constables, and patrolled the city and the suburbs constantly.

The *Gadfly* also steamed up and down the river, keeping a vigilant outlook.

In a week's time, ten thousand of the insurgents came in by detachments, and submitted to the terms set forth. Two-thirds of these, after paying the fine imposed, started work to re-build the demolished houses and stores. The other third packed up their belongings and prepared to leave the country. These were the confirmed idlers and rats, who had lived all their lives by plunder and who had no intention of doing any harder work. The authorities gave these all the assistance they could to clear out. After this others came in by detachments. Those who submitted and decided to stay were treated the same as the other citizens. They had received a severe lesson, and were not likely to break out again in a hurry. The crisis was considered over now, and the miners prepared to return to their claims and make up for lost time. The discovery of the new field, when it was announced, did much to clear out the surplus population. Maps were drawn out, with the route, from the descriptions furnished by the discoverers. Twenty thou-

sand prospectors left the Klondike, along with the surveyors and a body of troopers, for this new treasure land. Many took their wives and children with them.

The work of the Vigilance Committee consisted mostly in inspecting those river steamers which brought passengers by the Yukon River route. The adventurers who had braved the toil and hardships of the inland passes: the Cheikoot and White Passes, with the Stikine River route, were mostly men and women who had come to claim fortunes by the sweat of their brows—they gave little trouble, for their aims were legitimate. But those passengers who preferred the easy, if more circuitous journey, had amongst them a large leaven of what had almost wrecked the goldfields. It took more than moral persuasion to make some of these gentry abandon the game and turn back to more appreciative society.

When they did return, however, to civilisation, they did their utmost to discount the stories of the gold output. Klondike was a fraud, they repeated, a land where good money is flung away, not gathered. It was not nearly such a lively place for some as it had been, under those new and somewhat rigid regulations.

But the Duchess Valerie was very happy, in spite of the mosquitoes, during the few weeks that she spent here.

She had the constant society of the one she loved, not wisely, but too well. She had also the kind of excitement which was, next to love, her ruling passion. She could speculate, and with her wealth outbid most of the other agents on the ground.

She plunged heavily and, as it almost seemed, recklessly, and purchased halves and quarters of mines right and left. She believed in what Sir Lewis told her about the new regions, and went in for shares in nearly half the valley; that is, she boldly pledged herself for large amounts for partnerships with those departing prospectors who had not yet seen the ground. Her Grace was a bold speculator, and, as she believed, a favourite of Dame Fortune.

Her guests also became infected with the same mania. They had all brought money to dabble more or less in the venture. When they visited the outlying mines and saw what was taken out, they also speculated wildly. Even his lordship the Bishop became the tenth partner in one of the mines, and privately resolved to start a company when he reached London with this same mine.

It was about gold-dust and place-claims they talked now in the saloons. They all held free miners' certificates, and were as full of pride and importance over these as any fresh-made City knight is about his brand-new title.

Everything had gone right that the Duchess had arranged. She had seen Sir Lewis Eastlake's lawyers before she left England, and won them over to her plans. They considered her most charitable and tender-hearted when she advised them to conceal from their client the theft and prison part of his wife's degradation.

"With this confession from the guilty woman, there is no end to be gained by hurting his pride or letting him know any further sordid details."

They quite agreed with her Grace, also owned that

this letter would be quite sufficient for Sir Lewis to get his decree *nisi*. Therefore, she commissioned them to communicate the tidings, and ask for instructions. She had promised Hope to keep this much of her shame a secret, and it served her own purpose to keep that pledge. She knew the nature of Sir Lewis too well to strain his credulity. He might—nay, he must—believe, after reading the confession, in the guilt of his wife. The least jealous, and the most doting of husbands would be convinced, after reading that letter.

But she was also aware that Hope and her husband had known each other from childhood. With that long intimacy it would be hard to make him believe that she was a thief as well as a faithless wife. A man will sooner credit his wife or friend with being capable of robbing him of his honour than of taking a purse.

After the fight was over, Sir Lewis was left alone in his cabin to read his home letters. The Duchess and Eric knew what the news would be. When she left him, she put a little billet into his hand. It contained a few sympathetic lines.

"Be brave, my friend, and discreet. Your marriage is a secret which Eric and I have kept strictly to ourselves."

He spent a couple of hours after his letters had been read with the devil and the river mosquitoes in that cabin dividing him between them, the mosquitoes sucking in his blood from the outside, and the devil gnawing at his heart inside.

Then, at last, with a savage oath, he leaped to his feet. As for poor Hope, he had whistled her off with

that oath, and "let her down the wind, a prey to fortune." She was no longer his wife.

How tender, how sympathetic, how considerate his true friend Valerie was with him now. Those parting days at Falaise, those sweet, poison days had left dregs in his memory that never left it. He had, during the past year, thought upon those days with self-reproach, while his heart beat fondly towards his wife. He recalled them now with keen triumph and delight. And Valerie did not attempt any coy forgetfulness. She was too fiercely in earnest. She had waded too deep in guile and crime for this passion, to play with it now. Many mortals love all the more intensely, and prize the gift more deeply according to the price it has cost them, in honour, pride and truth.

She felt instinctively that he would come to her for consolation as soon as he had finished this battle royal with his heart, and the demons who had possession of it. She knew also that this moment would be potent in her favour, if he came.

Therefore she sat in her cabin, now changed to a silken nest, with the meshes of fine netting closing it in like a cage. She was safe from the mosquitoes with that netting, and the delicate but potent incense that burnt on the little table, and her perfumed cigarettes.

It was a long wait, and she had almost given him up before he came. She had smoked many cigarettes, and felt dry in the lips, but whether from her own agitation or the smoking she could not tell. Softly she touched one of the numbered knobs and produced a small flask of elixir. A few drops of this in a glass of water, and the jaded look left her face, while her lips

again became moist. She was girlish, fresh and beautiful once more.

She had just closed the cabinet and seated herself, when the expected and welcome knock sounded upon the panel. In another moment he was standing before her, with the door shut by the discreet maid and the mosquito netting dropped before it.

They were alone and the moment had come.

Her heart beat as it had done that horrible evening at Falaise, only this time there could be no mistake. Her captive was too well meshed round. He was pale, even with his sun-burn, but with a resolute expression on his face and a fierce glitter in his blue eyes. That was the expression she liked to see. The air of her master.

She raised her lustrous yet humid and large brown eyes to his shyly, yet ardently. There is a glint in those dark eyes, when the owner wills it, that is unmistakable; that requires no words to reveal what her emotions are. Even if he had been timid, which he was not now, that mesmeric flash would have made him bold. Even if those confessions at Falaise had never occurred, he must have known that she adored him from that melting, upward glance, and the slight shiver which passed over her.

"Valerie, I have come to you."

"Lewis, I am glad you have come to me at last."

He sank on his knees in front of her, and with one burning glance at her ravishing loveliness, he put his arms round her neck and drew her face forward. Then for the long moment that their lips met, soul seemed to merge within soul. Valerie the unapproachable had conquered and was conquered. Passively she

rested in his arms, feeling that a thousand hells were worth wading through for such a moment of heaven.

He was hers at last. No power on earth could part them now. She had plucked that former weak fancy out of his heart, and filled it with inextinguishable flame. No sentimental language passed between them. When he spoke next it was to revert to his own affairs.

"You are quite sure, Valerie, that only Eric knows, outside ourselves, about my fatal marriage with—that woman?"

"Would I have you here if that were known to my guests, Lewis?" she asked softly, nestling her dark head against his breast. They were standing now with his arms about her slim waist.

"Of course not. But they will know when my divorce comes on."

"Ah! but they will not know that I know," she answered naively.

He laughed a short and bitter laugh, then he said:

"Give me your advice, darling. I am in your hands, your dutiful slave ever after this."

"My master!" she answered quickly.

"How good you are to care for a weed like me."

"I like your kind of weeds, Lewis. Ah, my love! Kiss me once more, and then I will tell you what to do. Kiss me and say you love me, as I think you do, *now*, for you are all this world and the next to me."

"My own, my sweetest, my fairest, my truest."

Their lips met once more, and then they sat down side by side on the couch. She still leant against him,

and he was stroking her silken and massive blue-black tresses.

"Well, dearest, what am I to do?"

She did not look at him, while she whispered:

"Send off instructions to your lawyers to commence proceedings at once. I have seen your—Hope's letter. Your lawyer showed it to me before I left London, or I should not have come here."

CHAPTER XXIX.

AFTER MARS, VENUS.

SIR LEWIS EASTLAKE frowned slightly.

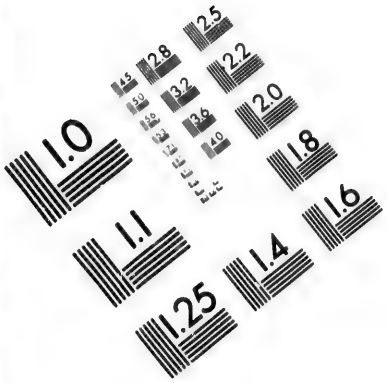
"That was rather a breach of confidence, don't you think, Valerie?"

"No, Lewis. I had already heard how you were deceived, and—and, I loved you. I wanted to comfort you in your affliction rather than let a stranger be near you. Forgive me, but I went to your lawyers and told them I was coming to you. I suppose they must have surmised that I was interested in you. Possibly, being lawyers, they jumped at conclusions. Possibly——"

"Enough, Valerie, my sweet darling. You are an angel, and I am of the earth—earthy," answered her lover abruptly. Then he said:

"Now, give me your instructions, and fix the programme."

"Let us go back by Japan and the Red Sea. From Vancouver you can wire instructions. Then we can linger about the Mediterranean until the case is settled. After that, let our good friend, the Bishop,



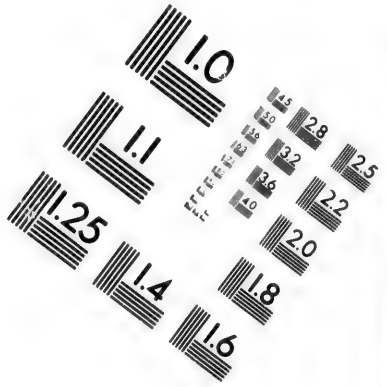
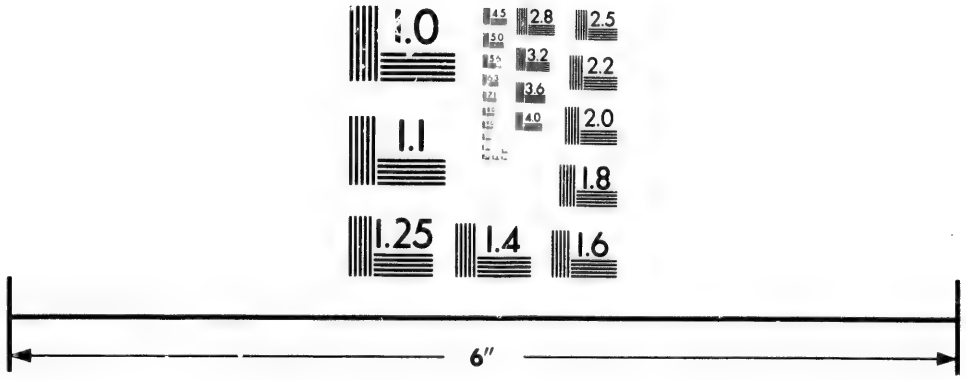
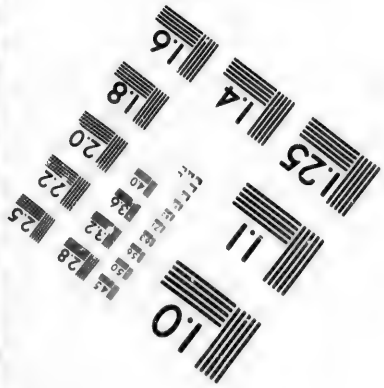
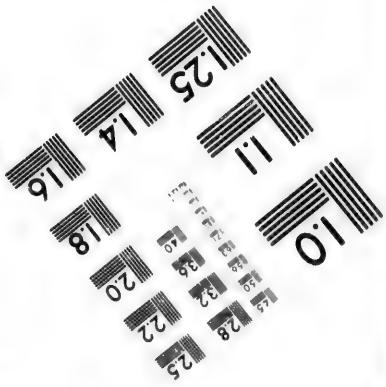


IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (MT-3)







Photographic Sciences Corporation

23 WEST MAIN STREET
WEBSTER, N.Y. 14580
(716) 872-4503

2.8
2.5
3.2
2.2
2.0
1.8
1.0

marry us on board this darling yacht, dear—that is all I can think about at present."

"Will you be satisfied with that sort of wedding, Valerie?"

"Can you doubt it, Lewis, my love? Don't you remember that it was on board this *Gadfly* that we first met, that I first knew what love was?"

"I remember; but I did not think *then* that you cared for me."

"Don't speak of that time, it is too—too sacred to me for words. Now I think I had better ring for a cup of tea; don't you think so also, dear? We are in Klondike, but we are not yet amongst the Esquimaux."

"Yes, only—say, Am I your lover or your guest, just at present?"

"Better say guest, until matters are further advanced," observed the Duchess, as she rose and touched the electric knob.

"Tea, please," she said to the maid when she appeared.

In a few more minutes they were sitting on separate chairs with the fragrant bohea pot between them; then, with a polite bow, Sir Lewis rose and left the Duchess, both to prepare for dinner. This is modern, fashionable life. All the tragedy, all the passion, and all the pathos are culminated in a cup of tea.

Sir Lewis Eastlake went off to dress, satisfied with *his* part. He had secured a mate, whose intensity it was not in his power to plumb. She adored him—of that he was sure—otherwise she would not have stooped to pick him up. He was a splendid specimen of manhood and courage, but he wasn't gifted with

too much brains. Few splendid specimens of manhood are.

Yet he was modest in his own estimate of his abilities. He hated the man who had taken Hope from him, whoever he was; but he did not wonder greatly that she had left him. Therefore, he accepted that part of his destiny. What he wondered at, however, was, what the Duchess—this incomparable and much sought-after woman—saw to admire in him, poor devil that he was. He was ready to love her, *as much as he could.* In reality, all the *spirituelle* part of love that he knew had already been given to Hope. He appreciated the Duchess Valerie for her condescension and her matchless charms; but, had Hope been only faithful, he would rather have spent his life with her in a foreign boarding-house than rule over the wide domains of the Duchess Valerie. But Hope was unworthy, and her Grace was true. He sighed, and cursed deeply as he fitted his white tie on at the glass before he went in to dinner.

The Duchess Valerie that night gave to her maid a dress worth a hundred guineas, which she had only worn once. Duchesses always choose their maids as near to their own size and figure as they can, so that they may save these ladies' ladies the trouble of cutting and altering.

At dinner, the Bishop remarked afterwards, her Grace had never before been so sparkling and vivacious. She was truly a most charming hostess.

At last the day arrived for the *Gadfly* to take her departure from that most uninviting swamp, Dawson City. No human being, unless he were an Indian, would think of lingering on the Klondike for

pleasure. There were points of beauty about it, certainly; for Nature cannot help beautifying her most sterile wastes and her grimmest tragedies.

But that mud swamp and breeding nest of the most ferocious monsters of the insect tribe, did not invite the *dilettante* to linger long. It is difficult to be a downright and aimless loafer in the midst of a Yukon mosquito swamp.

The Duchess and her friends had got all their requirements now; therefore, they made their preparations for a speedy departure.

Bill Sykes had been made much of by this aristocratic company. Since Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show was in England, aristocrats have loved long-haired cowboys, as housemaids adore guards, and cooks policemen. Bill was an adaptable fellow, and really did not find it difficult to get into the habits and manners of his present friends. They were always natural, graceful, and easy. Bill was the same. He was now a man of means and would most likely be a millionaire before long. Aristocrats are always ready to *chaperone* millionaires, however eccentric or underbred they may be.

Bill Sykes, however, was not underbred, and he managed to control his Texan eccentricities of going on the "bust" with rye whisky, revolvers, and bowie-knives bristling over him. He imbibed as much liquid on board the *Gadfly* as he had done down Texas, but it was riper stuff; therefore, it made him benevolent instead of murderous. He started his fashionable career by falling head over ears in love with the Duchess. A little conversation with her, however, shewed him that this was not at all likely to be a winning game. Then he turned his roving black

eyes amongst the maidens, and quickly discovered someone more likely to be accessible. Lady Victorine Ethel was the third daughter of an impecunious earl of ancient lineage. She was twenty-three, tall, well-developed, blue-eyed, and golden-tressed; a young lady disposed to many manly exercises, sharp-shooting, and field sports, rather than the study of books.

Bill swooped upon her like a German eagle, and made love to her in the fashion she liked—the fashion that seemed to be popular during the Plantagenet reign, judging from the courtship of Richard III. and Lady Anne. In four days' time after the introduction of those kindred spirits they were engaged, with the approval of the Bishop and the dowagers.

"He is quite a distinguished-looking young man," remarked these authorities in style and tone. "Rich enough to satisfy her dear parents, and he can always purchase a title in Italy; therefore, our dear Victorine has not done so bad. Besides, it is a love match, which is so sweet and pleasant, isn't it?"

Bill had arranged with his partner that he would return to "Mosquito Valley," as they termed this new diggings; while Sir Lewis went to England to work the money market.

But now that he had won his squaw, *à la* Dickon Plantagenet, he had no notion of letting her go out of the range of his keen and masterly glances. It might not be according to patrician precedents, but as Victorine Ethel was willing, Bill boldly demanded her hand before the *Gadfly* quitted the Klondike River.

The dowagers, as old school representatives, made objections, on the plea of haste and irregularities. Bill hunted up a *bonâ-fide* solicitor amongst the miners

who quickly drew up the contracts. When Lady Victorine said she wished to explore the country, the dowagers submitted. A bird in the hand was worth two in the bush.

The Bishop was delighted to celebrate this wedding with all the pomp and state available. For two days the sailors worked diligently at making the promenade deck as like a church as possible. This part of the yacht was chosen for the holy ceremony, because Dawson City demanded the pleasure of attending as witnesses. It was impossible to accommodate the thousands who were determined to see this fashionable wedding; therefore, the yacht was drawn up to the banks and the awning removed.

This wedding was a huge affair. Jewels blazed upon the bosoms of the bridesmaids. As for the bride, it is impossible to describe her—at least for this writer, not being used to the technical terms of the fashionable modiste. The Dawson City witnesses, however, declared it to be immense and most infectious.

In fact, before the *Gadfly* left, his lordship had a monster coupling celebration to perform. Two hundred couples were tied up for life at one service. It isn't every day that a Bishop could be within reach; therefore, the young men and maidens took advantage of his presence, and he was condescending enough to perform this pious duty.

Nor was it an unrequited service on the part of his lordship. Each happy bridegroom took down to the spare cabin bags of gold dust, of varying weight, according as they valued their obligations. When the good Bishop afterwards weighed the contents of these

two hundred bags, he found himself the owner of two thousand ounces of gold dust. Verily, this labourer had been appreciated in the Klondike vineyard.

On the following morning after the ceremony, Bill Sykes and his daring bride departed for Mosquito Valley. Five hundred adventurers went with them, amply provided with supplies. It was a large and enthusiastic band of plucky Argonauts who had placed themselves under the able leadership of long-haired Bill and his lovely bride, Lady Victorine Sykes.

"Good-bye, till we meet in London next fall," shouted Bill. "I'll take good care of Lady Victorine Ethel, and bring back a substantial pile, you bet."

Then they went off. Bill and his happy wife on horseback with their Winchesters and revolvers gleaming in the July sunrays, while the *Gadfly* got up steam and went down the river.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ATTACK OF THE YUKON PIRATES.

THE *Gadfly* got over the first part of the river voyage without any incident worth relating. The captain, sailors, and engineers were alert and busy enough always.

The Duchess Valerie was undoubtedly the happiest woman on board. She was too astute to exhibit this joy; therefore, she treated her lover much the same as her other guests. A half-hour's promenade now and then satisfied her, while she listened contentedly to his whispered praises and protestations. A tender glance when they met or sat together at the tables;

she had managed to get him next to her at table, and this gave her as much as she dared demand of his society at present.

She wrote letters to him, however, which exercised him a good deal to read and reply to, even in his terse style. In her cabin she would sit and think about a dozen devices to lure a line or two from him in return. Then, armed with the excuse, she would pour out on paper some of the passion that was oppressing her.

She knew that his answer would be short and lacking, yet there were always some few sugar-plum expressions to keep her going till the next day.

Sir Lewis Eastlake was not bored by these personal and delicate attentions. He would have been a strange young man if he had been, with such a fascinating, lovely, and adroit creature stooping to give her love. He wished, perhaps, sometimes that there had been a telegraph office on the yacht, his replies were so telegraphic in their brevity that a sheet of paper appeared always too large to fill up. That was his only worry, however. The *tête-à-tête* kisses, tender looks and whispered protestations were much more easily executed than a written sentence, also decidedly pleasanter.

He did not love the Duchess in the same way that he had loved Hope, before he cast her out of his heart; yet he loved Valerie ardently. Her kisses thrilled him as his thrilled her. His heart beat rapidly when she was near him, and he longed to secure her to himself.

Away from her presence, pride in his victory over this matchless and conservative woman was the principal passion that engrossed him. He was proud of

her incomparable loveliness; proud of her grace, her dignity, and her brilliant social qualities, proud that she had chosen him to be her mate.

He did not think much of her vast and untrammelled possessions, which would make him one of the richest of aristocrats. His own prospects were sufficiently substantial now to render him independent of his future wife in this respect. He was glad of this, for with all his natural follies and faults, he had none of the instincts of the matrimonial fortune-hunter.

For six days they travelled down the river without any interruption. They passed Circle City and several other almost deserted townships, and heard from the storekeepers, that the steamers going before had taken most of the provisions which they had to sell.

These solitary storekeepers were eagerly on the look out for up-coming vessels, and expressed their surprise that, for the past week, none had arrived.

This surprised the Captain and pilots of the *Gadfly;* and caused them some anxiety as well, and only one answer to this delay seemed possible, which was that something was stopping them on the way. The river still flowed deep enough where they were, but it might have become shallow on the swampy lands. They trusted not, as that would mean a stoppage for weeks, perhaps, if not for the winter.

The Captain did not communicate those fears, but with his able officers and men kept a constant and keen outlook. As they approached the open country where the Yukon widened out, and the deep centre stream became narrow, they went along more cautiously and slowly. What troubled them mostly on these marshes were the occasional fogs which rose

up in the evenings, and obscured landmarks until the morning sun dissipated them. They had sufficient daylight always to have steered by, but for those marsh mists. When they rolled up, however, there was nothing to be done except to stand to and wait.

It was on the sixth afternoon that they sighted four steamers in the distance lying close together, as if stranded. As they steamed slowly up, they recognized the *May Queen* and a river boat on each side of the current, seemingly fast stuck amongst the ooze. The other two steamers evidently had just come up, and were trying to tug the stranded vessels into deep water.

To make matters worse, a mist was beginning to rise up from the surrounding marshes. It was a dreary spot to be stranded upon.

Cautiously they crept along the tortuous stream until they were within speaking distance, and then they hailed and asked for information. By this time the craft were almost obscured.

"The river is all right down below, but we shall be glad if you can give us a hand here," shouted a voice from the *May Queen.*

"Is that you, Captain Brown?" asked the *Gadfly's* commander.

"No," replied the same voice. "Captain Brown is on the sick list. I am the first mate."

"All right, we shall anchor here until the fog lifts and then help," answered Commander Osborne.

Next moment the anchor was dropped and the *Gadfly* was stationary.

Although not suspecting anything sinister about this meeting, yet the commander resolved to act with

prudence, knowing the rough passengers who had been packed on these steamers. He had a tempting quantity of gold dust on board, which made him extra careful.

Therefore, he quietly assembled the gentlemen into the smoke-room, and advised them to arm themselves, and be prepared for possible emergency. The ladies he ordered to keep to the saloon, for that evening, at any rate.

It was sage advice, and, as the next hour proved, timely foresight.

They were all dressed for dinner while the anchor was being dropped, and within a few moments the dinner bugle sounded.

"If those 'Toughs' mean to be aggressive, they will take the opportunity of boarding us while we are at dinner," said the Captain. It was therefore resolved that, while the ladies went below, the gentlemen would take some refreshment on deck.

The port-hole shutters were dropped, and the guns brought into position. The search and deck-lights were also prepared, and ready to switch on at a moment's notice. As yet, however, the daylight was with them and the sun above the horizon. They had dined later than usual since coming into the Yukon, as they liked the cool of the evening for that operation.

It was now nearly eleven o'clock, and the mist was lying on the deck and obscuring objects.

Twelve o'clock was rung out without any attack being made. Most of the gentlemen were beginning to get ravenous. Indeed, the Captain himself advised them to go below by relays and fortify themselves.

From the different steamers could be heard the sounds of revelry and musical instruments being played.

"Only for one suspicious thing, and I would feel easy," said the Captain. "That is, none of the captains or officers have come aboard to interview us."

"That is a little singular, certainly," replied Sir Lewis.

One o'clock, or two bells, rung out. Most of the ladies had by this time gone to their cabins, and the gentlemen were beginning to yawn and shiver in their overcoats. Brandy was in request, and coffee. It was the moment of greatest darkness.

All at once the lights were turned on, making the fog gleam like blue flames. As the gentlemen cast aside their coats and looked, the fog seemed crammed with silent phantoms. Then the Maxims and Gatling guns rattled out into this phantom army, and a struggle began, gruesome and horrible in its vagueness and uncertainty.

The pirates were clambering over the rails from all sides, and would certainly have succeeded had they not been short of boats, or if they had been better generalled.

But the defenders of the *Gadfly* had a few moments of grace before the two floating river steamers came up. They gathered themselves into a compact mass in front of the saloon entrance, now closed and secured, and there they stood and blazed away, while the gunners swept the other parts of the deck perpetually.

While they fought desperately on the saloon deck, and the gunners poured forth their lead from the mid portion, the captain had placed his long gun on the

forecastle deck and was pounding away in the direction of the floating steamers.

All at once a fierce explosion took place in front of them, and the fog in front became lurid. One of the two up-coming steamers had been blown into the air. The long gun must have struck the powder or dynamite magazine.

There was nothing to do but fire, and wait for the fog to lift before they could charge. What a time that sun seemed to take before it rose and with its rays penetrated the mist.

Fiercely and persistently the river pirates continued the contest. They had not expected to be received so resolutely, but they were desperate now. With the destruction of that steamer, and the other making no signs, they were like rats in a corner. At last the one side could see the other. For three long hours they had fought blindly.

The *Gadfly's* decks were covered with dead and dying, lead had been the only weapon used, and so densely had the bullets poured that few even of the defenders were unwounded.

The fight was over with the lifting of that fog. On the *May Queen* and the other stranded steamer, the original officers and crew were disarming and binding the swearing pirates. Of the two free steamers, there were no traces. One had perished, and the other steamed out of sight.

The story was a simple one, as told by Captain Brown and the others. They had been surprised by their desperado passengers and confined, but had managed, during the battle, to get their liberty and lend a hand.

In three hours more the *Gadfly* was once more on her way, followed by the two vessels that she had liberated from their moorings. The dead were cast overboard, and the wounded carried down to the cabins.

Out of the *Gadfly's* defenders five were killed and a number wounded.

Captain Eric St. Arnoul and two of the married gentlemen were amongst the slain, also two of the sailors.

Sir Lewis Eastlake had also been hit and was carried below, bleeding and unconscious.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SPECTRE WITH THE SCYTHE.

MRS. HAMBLY and her charge were sent to a charming little village near Worthing. A furnished cottage was taken for their accommodation, by her Grace's man of business, guided by the advice of one of the most celebrated London physicians. It was "*caviare* as yet to the general," this quaint little old-fashioned village of Gatterling. Too slow and far removed from the sea-board for the usual holiday-makers, it stood about a couple of miles inland, on a gentle rise, with farms, woods, and rusticity on every side.

The physician had only recently discovered its health-giving properties for children. He only as yet revealed it to his prize patients, and baby Lewis John Eastlake was one of the earliest patricians to be sent there. He was sent down as an experiment, to prove

if this fashionable practitioner was quite correct in his estimate of the locality.

Therefore, although the unsophisticated rustics—rustics are always supposed to be unsophisticated—although they could not possibly be aware of the importance of Lewis John's advent, much depended upon it. If he throve and escaped any serious epidemic, then, instead of being farmers and cowkeepers on starvation incomes, they would become arrogant and bloated lodging-house keepers. If he throve, then the butterflies of society would pack all their incumbrances down here, with free consciences, and go on their fluttering careers gaily. The daughters of those starving rustics would get comfortable situations as nurses, the sons become upstart loafers, the mothers be able to grow fat and lazy, and the fathers be able to indulge in rum hot instead of four ale.

It was a big responsibility that had been placed on the baby shoulders of Lewis John. He must wax lusty and thrive on the milk of the land, or else the progress of that portion of the country might be retarded for fifty years.

Nurse Hambly—ex-laundress Hambly—was not exactly at home amid all this profusion and luxury. But she had been accustomed to direct and control Clapham laundry girls and washerwomen, and she did not feel at all appalled at having to domineer over a couple of rustic maidservants and a yokel man of all sorts. The village butcher, baker and grocer likewise, soon discovered that they had a customer worthy of respect. Nurse Hambly was an honest and uneducated woman, but she was not a simpleton. Few London women in her class of society are.

She had made up her maternal mind to act fairly to her employer, the Duchess. She would see that no undue waste went on at Honeysuckle Cottage.

But she had her own code of morality, as most of us have. She determined that the mother of Lewis John should be introduced on the scene as soon as she came out of prison. She wanted to keep her situation, for it was comfortable, lucrative, and to her taste. The Duchess wished to part mother and child. That was unnatural, and Nurse Hambly was natural first and conscientious afterwards; therefore she lay low, waiting until the six months were over, and then went to the prison and hung about on the day of Hope's release.

Hope was going towards the station, having politely rejected the aid of those benevolent Refuge House people, who lie in wait for released prisoners, when she met her old and faithful friend. Together they went up to London and visited a *costumière*.

When Hope Eastlake left that metamorphic establishment, even her keen-eyed enemy, the Duchess Valerie, would not have been able to recognise her, far less her husband.

She went in a pale-faced, sad-eyed, fair young woman. She emerged tawny-skinned and black-haired, with distinguishing birthmarks on her face that had not been there before.

The friends went back to Gatterling together, and Ruth Grayson, the new name of Hope Eastlake, was taken on as assistant nurse. This was the more easily accomplished as the lawyer of the Duchess had insisted on her having this additional help.

"Lor'! I can't think how them blooming toffs want

so many servants to look after a blessed mite like that," said Mrs. Hambly. "But there, my dear, you has your choice, an' no one will be the wiser."

It seemed a paradise to Hope, after prison, to have her baby all to herself in this quiet village. The fresh air, the delicious milk, the delightful seclusion. Ah, the good God had been merciful and gracious to her after all. He had led her through trial and tribulation to peace and rest. She had lost the man she loved, but oh! she still had her child.

Sweet and fragrantly that summer passed along, amongst the green lanes and down by the sea. When she was not attending to her loving duties, she looked after the garden. Honeysuckle Cottage became like an Eden. Already she had almost forgotten the bitter past.

And her baby throve. How could he do otherwise, surrounded with such tender and ever-watchful care? He became strong, cut his teeth, and before the leaves became russet, was able to toddle and cry "Mammy."

Hope was a regular attendant at church. She was a magnificent player on the organ and a cultivated singer, but she dreaded publicity, therefore she resisted her desire to join the choir and listened sadly to the village choristers. The vicar came and saw her, and while he patronised her never dreamt that this quiet, devout, black-haired and tawny-skinned woman had any special gifts. He was not too highly educated nor brain-gifted himself, otherwise he would not have been in this small village. But he was an earnest and a good young man, and he appreciated her as far as he could. She took in a weekly paper, because she wished to know something of the world and her own

affairs. One day she read about her husband, how he had been seriously wounded on the Yukon River by pirates. He was getting better, and a guest of the Duchess Valerie di Idumea. She did not feel resentful that the Duchess should nurse the man she had once loved; he was hers.

When she read that her husband was quoted as one of the millionaires on 'Change she felt glad. He would not be charged with marrying the Duchess for her money. She was pleased that he had been successful as a gold-seeker. Next came in a short paragraph. The divorce had been declared; it was dismissed in a few words. Her letter had been enough for the court; no witnesses had been called. She was pleased to be at this village and uncalled for. How dreadful would it have been to have faced, once again, those lawyers, with the unsympathetic judge and jury. Ah, poor Hope! She had lost something very precious when she could be pleased with all this.

Next came an account of the wedding of her husband and the Duchess Valerie di Idumea at Alexandria. Bishop Blank had married them, and she was now alone with her child. If she could only be crafty enough, she could still retain her child for a little time longer. Hope, the divorced wife of Sir Lewis Eastlake, resolved that she would be crafty, and try her best to keep her baby to herself as long as she could. Love for her husband lay dead.

It had been the end of July when Hope was liberated; about the same time that the Duchess Valerie was enjoying such happiness on the Klondike River. The summer sun rays fell hot over ripening field and dusty roads; almost as hot and fierce as they

shone over Dawson City swamp land at this time. But in this sweet English hermitage there were no mosquitoes to torment one ; no gold fiend to whip along the devotees with murderous strokes through a hell of discomfort and misery.

Under those drooping and interlacing boughs lay cool shadows, on the green dry banks, where the yellow primroses grew in the shelter of the leafy woods ; it was delicious to lie there and dream.

Down by the side of the brook, which ran sparkling and merry to the distant sea, Hope often took her baby to play during that ardent, ripening month. She liked best to carry him off and leave Mrs. Hambly at home to superintend the cooking.

What times they had together amongst the hay-fields, as she danced him up and down, while he crowed and laughed. Those evil months dropped from her like a veil of inky crape.

She was happy in spite of the divorce and the disgrace, for she was innocent, and could hold her baby without remorse. What had she lost that he did not amply compensate for ? As long as he was young and helpless, at any rate. By-and-bye, perhaps, when Time stole her baby, and left only a stranger son in its place, whom she dare not own ; then she might find leisure to brood upon the past.

But not now, while she could hug him and smother him with kisses ; not now, while he looked and laughed with her, and murmured : " Mam ! mam ! " ; not so long as the little golden head nestled so trustfully against her bosom all through the night. He was enough for all her yearnings and all her desires.

The summer swept on all too swiftly for her, who had lost the best part of it.

The sheaves were spread and carted home to stack; the village schoolboys had cut down the peas and beans, and gone back to school once again; the leaves had grown yellow, and red, and mottled, then they dropped from the branches and exposed the shivering birds.

Winter came, mild at first, until Christmas was over, then it locked the ground in with ice and snow, which lasted until the middle of March.

It was at this time, just a week or two before winter finally succumbed, that a fresh trial came upon that fond mother.

The baby fell ill in spite of all their care and attention. One afternoon he became sick and shivery, and as he had been restless for several days, the village doctor was sent for.

He did not express any opinion, but gave them some medicine and directions what to do. Next morning he called, and looked grave when he saw a bright red rash on the face and neck.

"What do you think it is, doctor?" asked Hope, in an agony of suspense.

The doctor opened the child's mouth and looked at his throat, then he shook his head.

"I am afraid it is a case of scarlatina; but baby is in very good hands with you and Mrs. Hambly to look after him, if you are not afraid of the infection."

"*Afraid!*" cried Hope fiercely; then, at a warning look from her supposed mistress, she suddenly remembered that her name now was Ruth Grayson; also

that she was only the nurse. She, therefore, altered her tone, and said more humbly :

"I am not afraid of infection, and I will nurse baby."

"To-night we will know for certain," resumed the doctor. "I will bring another practitioner over with me from Worthing, and we can then make sure. Of course, you will have to isolate yourself from the rest of the household as much as possible, and take other precautions, if my fears prove correct and you desire to keep the baby at home."

"I know. I am sis——" She was going to say "sister of a doctor," but once more she remembered in time, and said instead : "I have had a good deal of experience in sick nursing, and I prefer to look after this case to having any stranger sent ; don't you, Mrs. Hambly ? "

"Certainly, my dear ; no stranger nurses here. I've nursed five of my own through scarlet fever, and although one did die, and Mary still has some dregs left, owing to a chill, the rest are all right, thank 'eaven."

That same night the village was made aware that scarlet fever had broken out in Honeysuckle Cottage. This did not alarm them greatly, as there is generally always something breaking out where children are—in the country, particularly.

But to poor Hope, it was deadly tidings ; for well she knew the horrible and lingering nature of this painful and malignant disease.

She knew what to do much better than did Mrs. Hambly, for all her personal experience. She had studied the subject scientifically.

Therefore, she set herself resolutely to fight with

Death for her child. They were all in the hands of God; but she determined to leave nothing to chance. If watchful devotion could save the life of Lewis John, and, what was also important, prevent any after effects, she resolved to be the sleepless watcher.

Mrs. Hambly considered it great folly to take all the precautions against the spread of the disease. She could not see the necessity of hanging disinfected sheets in front of the bedroom door, or that she should change her dress as she went in or out. These precautions had never been taken in the past, yet, patients had gone on living and dying—especially dying—in the olden time. But the mother insisted; the old woman yielded, and obeyed her orders.

The doctors came together after this every day, and declared themselves quite satisfied with what Hope was doing. It was not yet at the infectious stage nor would it be until after the crisis was over. But Hope shut herself up with her baby, and never left the little sufferer day or night for a moment while that burning fever lasted. For eight days she watched, hardly closing her eyes, and then only for a few moments at a time, while her darling tossed about and moaned in that burning fever that nothing could relieve.

"Oh, Father of Mercy, spare my child; and if a sacrifice is wanted, take my life for his."

So she prayed constantly, as she watched and fought tirelessly with the pale spectre who carries the scythe.

CHAPTER XXXII.

STEPHEN BELWOOD AT HOME.

ALTHOUGH Stephen Belwood fixed the large amount of fifty thousand pounds as the price of her revenge to the Duchess, not a twentieth part of it left his hands.

He satisfied the scruples of Mr. Algernon Churchill Champion by promoting him to the board of several new and sound companies, thereby increasing his income by some more hundreds per annum. He likewise gave him some sage hints as to good investments, and thus secured the gratitude and silence of that gentleman.

To the amiable spouse of this virtuous director he presented five hundred pounds' worth of fresh jewellery. He did not think it necessary to give more, as for their own sakes they would keep quiet over that bit of perjury and baseness.

Walter Gordon was the worst customer he had to deal with, this gentleman being in a number of his other secrets, and about as wily as he was himself.

He had to part with three thousand pounds before Walter even pretended to be satisfied. They had a bitter contest over this deal in the private office of the money-lending establishment, and said hard things to one another. Finally, however, Walter consented to take that sum as a compensation for having to leave his beloved London.

It was necessary to get him out of the way as well as Mr. and Mrs. Solomon Davis, in case inquiries

were afterwards instituted. The manager, Walter Gordon also felt it wise that he should obliterate himself for a while, since his name had been mixed up with that of Hope Eastlake. Outraged husbands are ugly customers for smooth-faced Lotharios to be interviewed by, and personal courage was not one of this young man's shining qualities.

Therefore he re-christened himself, as did his subordinate Solomon Davis. Mr. Stephen Belwood paid their passage out to Melbourne, and gave them employment there in a Money Lending branch establishment, which he commissioned his late manager to open in that gay city of the South.

Walter Gordon took out his passage as George Walters, and his companions as Mr. and Mrs. Saul Denvers. One thousand pounds was their perquisite for helping to ruin Hope.

The pawnbroker's assistant who had identified Hope as the pledger of the jewellery he bestowed twenty pounds upon, and gave him a rise in his profession with an increase of salary.

Possibly he may have considered himself justly entitled to the bulk of the wages of sin, seeing that he was the master sinner. At any rate, he stuck to it as his legitimate rights. It was a large amount, certainly, but not too large for his commission, he thought, considering the risks he ran if ever this plot was discovered

Having settled these matters to his own satisfaction, if not entirely to that of his tools, he proceeded to look after more regular business. Since his business relations with the Duchess Valerie good luck in his City speculations seemed to have turned entirely in his favour. Formerly he had had reverses, as all specu-

lators have at times, and met them with Stock Exchange philosophy.

But now, and for the past year, Pluto had adopted him and imparted to him the gift of King Midas; whatever he touched changed into gold for him and his followers. For a year past he had not failed in a single forecast. Whatever schemes he took up or patronized were successes.

This meant, of course, that he was accumulating wealth so rapidly that already it was beginning to lose much of the pleasure it once had. He did not grow any more generous or philanthropic, however. He was becoming, if anything, more penurious and mean about trifles.

Of late, money-lenders had been having uncomfortable times in the courts, and nasty exposures in the papers. As yet his business had escaped this inquisitorial handling, but he began to tremble lest his hour might come.

Stephen Belwood, the City Colossus, began to get a distaste for those pettifogging and sordid businesses which his prudent father had left to him. For the sake of his name in the City and that fashionable dame who looked after his private mansion, he decided to get rid of those businesses as speedily as possible.

Once decided the matter was easily done. He flung them upon the market and made them into companies. Shares were issued, and the capital speedily secured, and the price paid into his own bank by round-about processes which kept his name entirely out of the business. Men of straw served him in this and disappeared after the transactions were completed. He

was now only to be identified with these businesses according to the shares which he had openly purchased.

The Melbourne branch, which had just been started, went with the rest of the property.

Now, as Stephen Belwood took care to keep his own name out of the board of directors and be only an ordinary shareholder, he managed to keep clear of any of the future arrangements.

This made a vast difference to his late employés, particularly to his Melbourne manager, Walter Gordon, *alias* George Walters, and his friend Solomon Davis, *alias* Saul Denvers. These worthies no sooner had installed themselves, expecting a good time of it, than they found their wings clipped and themselves under the control of strange masters. This they both resented bitterly, and in six months after their arrival at the Antipodes, they resigned, and were once more voyaging homewards, brooding upon their wrongs and plotting revenge.

"If the boss tries to kick we'll tackle the Duchess," said the ex-manager, who knew a little more about affairs than Stephen was aware. "He isn't the man to work a game like this without written authority and he is the last man to destroy the incriminating documents. I'll work to get those from him, and then we can have two cows to milk, Sol, my boy."

While these things were happening, however, the long expected cablegram arrived from Dawson City. The Duchess had written in cypher, and the message had been wired from Vancouver. On the strength of this Stephen Belwood did a stroke worthy of his reputation. He had rumours spread so as to make a slump in Klondikes, then he purchased privately as many shares

as he could. The following week, all the papers were filled with the discovery of Sir Lewis Eastlake and his companions, and the highest boom of the century was in full force. Mr. Stephen Belwood and those in his confidence were, in a week's time, fabulously rich. besides being masters of the position.

When he received the wire from his agents in Melbourne of the resignation and departure of his rebellious tools, he experienced a slight sensation of uneasiness, but he recovered his calmness.

One morning in the month of March, as Mr. Belwood entered his City office, shivering under his fur overcoat, his chalk-like face more like a corpse's than ever, his dark eyes dim and deeply set, his walk feeble and wearied, he saw in the outer office his former manager, Mr. Walter Gordon. He expected him to come about this time, therefore he did not express any surprise. He merely wished him good morning and ushered him into his private den.

When the door was shut he removed his overcoat and sank wearied into his chair.

"Well, Walter, you did not care much for Haustralia surely, since you har back so quickly?"

"No, governor, I didn't like Australia, neither did Sol Davis, so we've come back like the proverbial——"

"The voyage 'as done you good. You look splendid," said Stephen, eyeing him furtively.

"I can't say the same for you, governor. You are not looking at all well."

"Oh, I'm well h nough. There's nothink hever much wrong with me."

He waved his hand impatiently. He did not like people to condole with him about his personal appear-

ance or apparent state of health. Walter Gordon knew this and grinned.

"Well, I've come to consult with you about my future, Mr. Belwood. What do you propose?"

"Hi hexpect I must do somethink for han hold pal. Hi've been thinking hover you and Sol Davis, hand I think I can fix you hup."

"In what way?"

"Well, I ha'nt got time to-day to discuss the matter, has I 'ave some business to hattend in the City, but if you can come houc to my private 'ouse to-night we'll talk hit hover. Come habout ten o'clock hand 'ave a smoke."

"Yes, governor, I'll be there."

Walter Gordon glanced keenly around him as he sat there. There was a safe in this room, but it was standing open, as if inviting inspection. "No," he thought, "he doesn't keep any private papers here. They must be at his own house."

He rose and shook hands with his old employer and went out to meet his pal Solomon and concoct plans.

At ten o'clock, as Stephen Belwood was lingering and obliterating himself as much as possible in the drawing-room, a card was brought to him with "Mr. George Walters" on it.

"Shew the gentleman hinto my study, please," he said to the domestic. "Hi will see him there."

A few moments afterwards he glided out from that fashionable throng and sought his visitor. Walter Gordon had been there first, and looking round formed his own conclusions.

Stephen Belwood, after getting his visitor served with brandy and soda and cigars—he did not smoke

himself, at least, not tobacco, neither did he drink spirits—started business.

They argued matters out for an hour, then Walter Gordon said he was satisfied. He would take a cheque for two thousand pounds, and a few payable directorships.

Then Stephen Belwood opened his private safe and got out his cheque-book, well pleased that he had managed affairs so well.

He left Walter Gordon at the fireplace, smoking one of his finest cigars, while he turned his back upon him to fill up the cheque. He had just signed his name and was about to blot it, when suddenly a handkerchief steeped with chloroform was pressed upon his mouth and nostrils, that in his weak condition he could not ward off. A gasp or two, and Stephen Belwood dropped like a dead man, under the grip of his powerful assailant.

Walter Gordon held his victim with that saturated handkerchief over his mouth and nostrils for fully five minutes. Then, satisfied that he was past resistance, he carried him over to the couch and laid him down there.

He next locked the door and began his search in the open safe. Stephen Belwood had opened it to get his cheque-book.

At last he had secured the papers he wanted. He read them to see if all were right, and, satisfied, he crammed them into his inner coat pocket.

Then, with one last look at his unconscious victim on the couch, he opened the door, and walked quietly down the staircase to the hall.

The hallkeeper let him out obsequiously, helping

him on with his hat and coat. Then, quite satisfied, he went out of the front door.

Two yards from the door, in the street, he found himself gripped and arrested for a little bit of private swindling which he had done before he had left England for Australia.

Dastardly fate. It was only for three pounds five; and he had in his pocket a cheque for two thousand pounds, and documents enough to secure him a life of affluence. Walter cursed his luck as he resigned himself to his fate.

Solomon Davis, who had been hanging about for his admired friend, skedaddled when he saw the arrest. He lay *perdu* for the next day until he received a message from his imprisoned friend through his lawyer. It ran thus:

"See the Duchess and warn her. All up. Get what you can out of her to help *me*, and *vamoose*."

Solomon Davis took the hint and the first boat after this for Calais, and hied him straight south to Italy, leaving Madame Davis to follow at her leisure.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FAREWELL TO VALERIE.

THE wound which stretched Sir Lewis senseless on the deck of the *Gadfly* was not a serious one. It might have been, however, from the part it struck, with a thin-skulled man. Sir Lewis, however, possessed a good hard and solid frontal brain-pan,

while the bullet did a ricochet, and made only an ugly-looking scalp wound.

It drove all consciousness from him until the doctor had cut his hair and sewed up the broken skin. It also made him a very gory spectacle, and gave him the appearance of being the most desperately wounded man on the yacht.

But after the blood was sponged from his face and neck, and the doctor had revived him, he was able to go up on deck again and enjoy a cigar, while he listened to the news. The Duchess had been well-nigh frantic until he appeared and reassured her that he was still alive and able to kick. Ten hours of sound sleep restored him almost to his former fine condition of health, and the Duchess once again became serene.

They had fought bravely and calmly, as Britishers always do when attacked by long odds. It is only when the enemy are about of equal number that our countrymen have a chance of being conquered, for we are a phlegmatic lot, and require something sudden and critical to rouse us up.

Captain Eric St. Arnoul finished his career as he would have wished. After a good hour of hard shooting, during which he sent the souls of many desperadoes before him to the happy hunting-grounds, he received his own instant despatch with a bullet between the eyes. There was no ricochet for him. The ball passed clean through his head and left but few traces of its passage; when found, he was smiling as peacefully as a child does sometimes in his sleep.

These untimely deaths, with the wounded on their hands, cast a shadow of gloom for a time for the

festive party. However, by the time they reached Yokohama, the dead were forgotten, and most of the wounded convalescent. Then they went once again happily and cheerfully upon their way.

It was at Port Said that Sir Lewis received the letters which told him that the divorce had been carried successfully and without appeal, through the court. He was now able to announce to his friends his engagement to the Duchess, and the services of the Bishop were at once requisitioned. Alexandria, being a more fashionable resort for English society people than Said, the wedding was decided to be performed there.

It was a satisfactory occasion for the dowagers, as well as for the Bishop, for three of the most eligible young convalescents had been nursed by their *inamoratas* up to the marrying point. They decided to be tied at the same time as Sir Lewis and the Duchess Valerie, and accompany them on their honeymoon.

Honeymoons generally are, as they ought to be, engrossing times, when the matches are made by Dan Cupid, particularly during the growing half of the honeymoon. It is the waning that has to be provided for.

There was no waning for the Duchess Valerie. She felt that she could never merge from the passionate lover into the tolerant matron. She was a being of thrilling nerve and wild intensity.

Her lover was now her husband, and his kisses removed all memory of those past miseries, hatred, and guilt. She had entered the house of sin and falsehood to win him; therefore, she could never regain

her lost estate, but with love she could forget. In his arms she remembered her evil no more.

He was an honourable gentleman; therefore, she had no fear for his fidelity. He would always be true to the vows he had taken at Alexandria—that she knew and felt satisfied about. Marriage is heaven to a wife who loves, so long as her soul has no room for doubt or jealousy.

Jealous Valerie was, and ever would be of his past, but it was a jealousy which made her the more eager to please him, which kept her affections more active. It was a jealousy that crushed and silenced the voice of conscience, and made her his devoted slave. But although so dotingly and passionately fond of this not over brilliant gentleman, she was woman of the world enough—young as she still was—to take care not to weary him with her fondness.

Sir Lewis, or as he was termed now, his Grace the Duc di Idumea—for Valerie had been able to bestow her titles as well as her other possessions to this favoured child of fortune—liked travelling, and he had no desire yet to return to England; therefore they went from place to place during the whole of that winter and well on to the next spring.

Valerie had been permitted to take a deeper draught from the fountain of love than falls to the lot of ordinary humanity; yet still the fountain flowed on as lavishly as ever. Would it never cease to flow?

"Never!" she vowed to herself, as she stooped to the rill and drank thirstily. "When love begins to ebb, or run lower, I shall go on the turn of the tide." She did not expect it to last for ever any more than she could expect her youth and loveliness to endure;

but she resolved to end it herself long before that time. "I must always be young in his eyes, always beautiful, always his lover." She had some years before her yet, however, she thought, and sufficient for the day was the pleasure to be compressed into it. So she loved, and was loved in the way her spirit craved for, all the time being prepared for the end.

Their movements, of course, were chronicled in all the fashionable and halfpenny papers. The upper and under classes both demand to know what the privileged ones of the earth are doing.

In the month of March it was announced that they had taken up their abode in Florence.

To Florence the messenger of evil, Solomon Davis, was now speeding as fast as trains could take him.

Valerie was out driving with her husband when Solomon called, and sent in his card with his new name engraved upon it. He was superciliously told to call again, but he belonged to those tribes which do not resent insults and never miss present opportunities.

He had no time to waste on useless calls. He had brought with him from London the latest edition of one of the evening papers, in which the death of Stephen Belwood was announced, also the arrest of Walter Gordon. Dark hints were given of some startling coming disclosures of scandal in high life, as the result of the financier's sudden death, and he wanted to be the first to warn the Duchess. Therefore, finding he could not get admittance to the villa, he sat down on the steps of the balcony and waited calmly.

* * * * * * * *

Solomon Davis had been paid a handsomer price than he expected for his timely information, and while he is hurrying to the bank to get the open cheque cashed, the Duchess Valerie sits alone in her boudoir. Her moment for decision had arrived; but it was not love that was on the wane. It was the total destruction of love, respect, and everything she prized which had come upon her out of the blue. She knew her husband too well to think that he would condone her offences. He would loathe her for her cruelty as he would abhor himself for his credulity. The end had come. How delicious those months had been, but ah! how short they seemed now that they were over! "If I only had been allowed three days of warning!" she muttered. "Ah, how I have wasted this past week!"

She had poison beside her—a swift-killing potion which would carry her out of life in an instant of time; but she had not bidden *adieu* to her love. Could she dare wait and do so first?

She read the paragraph once more. The police evidently had been reticent as yet, and the probing reporter had just got a hint and no more. With Stephen Belwood dead and Walter Gordon in prison, she was able to read between the lines, with the key supplied to her by Davis; but would her husband yet? No! *If he had only this information to guide him*, she was safe until the next day's issue, at any rate.

"I shall not do it yet," she exclaimed passionately. "I shall wait till my darling returns, then I shall find from his face if he knows more than this report can tell him. O God of Heaven, give me but one more day and night of life and love and I ask no more."

It was an impious prayer, yet it was granted to her as impious prayers sometimes are. From a secret drawer in her writing-desk she took a tiny box which contained only one large capsule. This box she placed in her purse, and then she went downstairs to wait and watch for her husband. She was now ready for him, and death. She had not long to wait, for her husband had seen the account of the financier's death, and hastened home at once to tell her about it. He had not read the other paragraphs.

She knew it as soon as she saw him, and her heart throbbed with a fierce delight and gratitude. His face was slightly graver than usual, but the same trusting and eager light lay in his blue eyes.

"I fear we shall have to go to England, Valerie," he said as he entered.

"Yes, and why, Lewis?" she asked as calmly as she could.

"I have just now read about the death of Stephen Belwood from heart disease. He was found dead in his study two days ago, and I expect, as director and partner in the Yukon Mines, I shall be wanted."

"Very well, dear, we shall go to-morrow."

"Oh! divine joy! Ah, merciful God," she inwardly cried, "thanks for this blessed respite." Outwardly she said gleefully: "Our last day in sweet Italy. What shall we do with it, Lewis?"

"Oh, go for another long drive, and to the opera to-night, that's about the best thing we can do, unless you have other engagements."

"No, I wish to be romantic to-day and to-night. I want you all to myself, sweet love. Our engagements —bah! Let us cancel them all, and pass to-day and

to-night as lovers. Let us shut the gates against all visitors for the next twenty-four hours, and try to feel as if this was our last day together. Say, Lewis, what would you do if it was our last day together?"

"Don't, Valerie. It gives me the blues to think of such things. It would be too—too awful for words or for realisation."

"But, supposing a prophet came and said: 'To-morrow, Valerie will be no more,' how would you propose to spend the day?"

She laughed lightly, yet she leaned against his breast and wafted her sweet breath into his face.

"If I thought it at all possible that we were to part to-morrow I should pass the intervening hours holding you to my heart."

"Then let us pass our time that way," she answered. "Let's stay within our walls, have our lunch in the arbour, and linger there until the nightingales begin to sing. It is full moon to-night. Let us go out to-night after dinner and watch the moon, and while you smoke your cigar and drink your brandy and Friedrickshall, I shall play my lute and sing to you, as Juliet might have done had she kept housewith Romeo."

There was something about Valerie when she played the siren, as she was doing now, that no man could possibly resist. Her programme was quickly decided upon. It was the first time since the wedding that Valerie had suggested or *appeared to suggest* anything to him, therefore he *yielded* all the more readily. Ah! rare Valerie, discreetest of wives. He had never moved a step during the past six months without your artlessly artful suggestion.

* * * * * * * *

The next morning they came down to breakfast together, lovers still. A pile of letters lay arranged at each plate.

"Am I to be tyrant still for one hour longer, *caro mio?*" asked Valerie, with an affectation of stage majesty. "You know it wants one hour to complete the twenty-four of my empire?"

"Yes, what are your orders, Queen?" replied and asked Lewis, casting a hungry look upon his letters.

"That you wait until my hour of supremacy has sounded before you read a single letter unless it be from *me*."

"On one condition."

"No conditions if you recognise our compact; yet let me hear what your condition is?"

"That you don't read yours either."

"I promise you that, Lewis, my slave for one more hour."

They sat down to breakfast. She was bright-eyed and beautiful, and he could not resist kissing her twice while she poured out the coffee. She laid down the coffee-pot each time and responded to his kisses with fervour.

After breakfast was over she stood over him and said tenderly, and, as he thought at the time, a little sadly:

"One more kiss, darling, the last for this my twenty-four hours of empire, then I shall go and write you a little love-letter, which you must read before you open one of these on the table. Will you promise?"

"Yes, Valerie, I can promise you that much, for I am now going to smoke a cigar on the terrace."

He drew her into his arms and kissed her on the

brow, the cheeks, and the mouth. For a long moment she lay against his heart, then she kissed him again and left him. She said nothing as she went out of the door, she merely looked back, smiling on him with that graceful pose that was her own, and which no other woman could imitate, and wafted him a farewell kiss.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE END.—RELIGHTED FIRES.

DURING the weeks when Hope was fighting for her infant's life, she read no papers, consequently she had no knowledge of what excited the attention of the world for a few days, and which was of so much personal interest to her.

The suicide of the Duchess Valerie was the biggest sensation. After that, the publication of those incriminating instructions, which she had at different times sent to Stephen Belwood. The Duchess, like most of her sex, did not pause to consider when she had a pen in her white hand and a sheet of paper before her. Stephen Belwood had kept those letters all in order, not for the publicity which had come to them, but merely as a hold over his fair employer.

Walter Gordon remarked to his solicitor: "It is just like my luck to be arrested for a trifle like this, while these letters were on me."

As for this trifle, which had been giving a bogus cheque in payment of a small account on the eve of his departure from England, he might have squared that. But the letters caused an explosion, and sent Walter Gordon and the pawnbroker's assistant, who

had committed perjury, on a five years' term of penal servitude.

Pretty, romantic Mrs. Algernon Churchill Champion managed to escape with two years for her part of the conspiracy. She swore that her husband knew nothing about it, and the jury had to believe her. Mr. Champion felt grateful to his little wife for screening him. He knew, of course, that her motive was not entirely devotion, but no matter, it saved his name and credit in the City.

Hope, in that quiet village, and confined to the sick chamber, had no means of learning how her name had once more been dragged into the court and cleared. At this time, even that tardy justice would not have moved her much.

Not so much as did the verdict of the doctor, when he gave her the blessed assurance that her baby was out of danger. He had fluctuated between life and death, so close at times to the fatal line that she could hardly believe in the good tidings. It took weeks, however, even after this, before Lewis John could be removed to allow that sick room to be disinfected. When Hope could find time to read a newspaper the death of Valerie was forgotten. Walter Gordon had done the first month of his time, and was congratulating himself that perjury and fraud were the only charges against him. Murder might easily have been added.

It was, indeed, a fortunate matter for him that a night had passed before the body of Stephen Belwood was discovered. Fortunate, also, that the doctor knew the condition of his heart and his drug-taking habits, and therefore regarded it as a natural death. He had

one anxiety now to trouble him in this retreat—his cheque. He had not signed it, and it was kept with his other effects by the authorities until his sentence had expired. Would he be able to get it cashed then, after five years? It all depended upon what money was in the bank at that time in the late Mr. Stephen Belwood's name. This was a corroding care to this undiscovered murderer. Another dark meditation kept him in a constant fury, and that was the escape of Mr. Solomon Davis. He knew that Solomon must have seen the Duchess before her death. It maddened him to think about the reward she had given him for his warning and that he and his wife were at large while he was shut up.

True, he had given Solomon the message to go; but that was before his conviction. It had not entered his mind that the Duchess would poison herself about such a *trifle*. He expected her to take a trip somewhere, and use her influence in his behalf. Walter Gordon could not understand people with title and wealth taking their lives. The uncertainty about his cheque, and the whereabouts of the Davises, gnawed at his vitals constantly.

One warm forenoon, about the latter half of May, Hope sat with her baby boy in the porch taking the sun. Lewis John was entirely better now, but he was not quite so rosy as he had been before his illness. His colour was coming back, but it was coming slowly.

All at once a shadow fell on the baby's face, and glancing up, Hope saw the man who had been her husband. His eyes were fixed on the child, so that he gave her time to recover herself. How glad she felt now that she had kept up her disguise. He would

consider her only as a servant, for doubtless he had come to see his child.

How changed he was, from the light-hearted, reckless and improvident husband who had parted from her at Cherbourg! Was it two or twenty-two years ago? she wondered, as she watched him furtively, waiting for him to speak.

He was grey-faced, and his light hair seemed to have become withered; in his fair moustache also were a number of silver hairs. A deep and frowning furrow lay between his eyebrows; but it was his mouth and his eyes that appalled that watcher. The mouth was grim, and the eyes were coldly stern. He appeared like a man who had parted with his youth and all its aspiration and dreams. He was as one disillusioned.

At last he spoke without looking at the mother:

"What is the name of this child?"

Stern, abrupt, and gloomy were the tones. He used to be polite and gentle to his inferiors. He seemed to have lost that quality now.

"Lewis John Eastlake," answered Hope, faintly.

He started, and looked keenly at her. She had not been able to disguise her voice nor her eyes. She knew in an instant that he had recognised her before even he said:

"Hope—and here?"

"Where should a mother be, if not beside her ailing child?" she asked steadily, as she rose and ushered him into the parlour.

Mrs. Hambly had joined them, hearing the voices, and Hope gave the baby to her to hold.

"Kindly excuse me for a few moments, Sir Lewis Eastlake; I shall join you presently."

He bent his head, and she retired, to get rid of that hateful disguise. Whatever the consequences were to be, she resolved to have no more concealments. She would appeal to his generosity, and try to be permitted to keep her child.

That was her one thought now—to be allowed to keep her baby; yet she felt a great pity for this miserable man whom she had *once* loved so dearly.

While she was making her toilet, Sir Lewis Eastlake sat with his head resting on his hands and his eyes fixed on the floor. One image was in his brain only, and there it stood perpetually before him—the image of the Duchess as she had parted with him at the door of the breakfast room at Florence.

Hope soon appeared as he had known her, only with her hair somewhat shorter. He knew the cause of those shortened tresses, as he looked at her with the same tender pity, as she had thought about him.

She learnt from his lips all that the papers might have told her had she seen them, and a warm glow crept into her heart at the thought of her innocence and purity being established. Her boy would not have to blush for his mother—that was good. She thanked God that this goodness had been given to her; it wiped away all her sufferings.

"I have sought you everywhere, Hope, since the death of—Valerie," he said.

"You knew where to find your child, though, did you not, Lewis?" she asked gently.

"Yes; but I wished to find *you* first."

"Then you ought to have come here, without searching farther," she answered calmly.

"We must be married again, Hope—for the sake of the child. Will you take me?"

"Yes, Lewis, I must—for the sake of the child," she replied gently.

So the bargain was made between the pair, who had once lighted their fires together from the torch of Eros.

Four weeks afterwards Hope stood beside her former husband at the altar, and they were re-united with much pomp and ceremony.

As the bride took her vows, she seemed to see her baby boy stretching out his arms and blessing her. As the bridegroom took his, in front of his vision floated the dead Valerie, as she had last said farewell, just before that awful discovery which had blanched his hair and seared his soul.

Hope, who had been Lady Eastlake before, was now a Duchess—by the gift of her dead rival.

Her baby, by the same gift, was a Marquis; a baby Marquis, with a big work cut out for him—the uniting of two severed hearts, and the exorcising the beautiful phantom which stood at present between them.

The phantom which now refused to be banished from each memory; the phantom which only that child wizard would be able to exorcise in time, perhaps, and bring joy and rest to those two unhappy and haunted spirits.

Would Valerie ever die and drift away? Truly, as yet, she had not been baulked even by death of her revenge.

THE END.